1 Vol 52 f.
10—

*"She appeared charming as usual; extended her hand to me."*

*—The Baroness, p. 5.*

THE MIROMESNIL EDITION
OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

# MONSIEUR PARENT
# QUEEN HORTENSE
# FASCINATION
## AND OTHER STORIES

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# MONSIEUR PARENT

GEORGE'S father was sitting in an iron chair, watching his little son with concentrated affection and attention, as little George piled up the sand into heaps during one of their walks. He would take up the sand with both hands, make a mound of it, and put a chestnut leaf on top. His father saw no one but him in that public park full of people.

The sun was just disappearing behind the roofs of the Rue Saint-Lazare, but still shed its rays obliquely on that little, overdressed crowd. The chestnut trees were lighted up by its yellow rays, and the three fountains before the lofty porch of the church had the appearance of liquid silver.

Monsieur Parent, accidentally looking up at the church clock, saw that he was five minutes late. He got up, took the child by the arm, shook his dress, which was covered with sand, wiped his hands, and led him in the direction of the Rue Blanche. He walked quickly, so as not to get in after his wife, and the child could not keep up with him. He took him up and carried him, though it made him pant when he had to walk up the steep street. He was a man of forty, already turning gray, and rather stout.

At last he reached his house. An old servant who had brought him up, one of those trusted

servants who are the tyrants of families, opened the door to him.

"Has madame come in yet?" he asked anxiously.

The servant shrugged her shoulders:

"When have you ever known madame to come home at half-past six, monsieur?"

"Very well; all the better; it will give me time to change my things, for I am very warm."

The servant looked at him with angry and contemptuous pity. "Oh, I can see that well enough," she grumbled. "You are covered with perspiration, monsieur. I suppose you walked quickly and carried the child, and only to have to wait until half-past seven, perhaps, for madame. I have made up my mind not to have dinner ready on time. I shall get it for eight o'clock, and if you have to wait, I cannot help it; roast meat ought not to be burnt!"

Monsieur Parent pretended not to hear, but went into his own room, and as soon as he got in, locked the door, so as to be alone, quite alone. He was so used now to being abused and badly treated that he never thought himself safe except when he was locked in.

What could he do? To get rid of Julie seemed to him such a formidable thing to do that he hardly ventured to think of it, but it was just as impossible to uphold her against his wife, and before another month the situation would become unbearable between the two. He remained sitting there, with his arms hanging down, vaguely trying to discover some means to set matters straight, but without success. He said to himself: "It is lucky that I have George; without him I should be very miserable."

Just then the clock struck seven, and he started up. Seven o'clock, and he had not even changed his clothes. Nervous and breathless, he undressed, put on a clean shirt, hastily finished his toilet, as if he had been expected in the next room for some event of extreme importance, and went into the drawing-room, happy at having nothing to fear. He glanced at the newspaper, went and looked out of the window, and then sat down again, when the door opened, and the boy came in, washed, brushed, and smiling. Parent took him up in his arms and kissed him passionately; then he tossed him into the air, and held him up to the ceiling, but soon sat down again, as he was tired with all his exertion. Then, taking George on his knee, he made him ride a-cock-horse. The child laughed and clapped his hands and shouted with pleasure, as did his father, who laughed until his big stomach shook, for it amused him almost more than it did the child.

Parent loved him with all the heart of a weak, resigned, ill-used man. He loved him with mad bursts of affection, with caresses and with all the bashful tenderness which was hidden in him, and which had never found an outlet, even at the early period of his married life, for his wife had always shown herself cold and reserved.

Just then Julie came to the door, with a pale face and glistening eyes, and said in a voice which trembled with exasperation: "It is half-past seven, monsieur."

Parent gave an uneasy and resigned look at the clock and replied: "Yes, it certainly is half-past seven."

"Well, my dinner is quite ready now."

Seeing the storm which was coming, he tried to turn it aside. "But did you not tell me when I came in that it would not be ready before eight?"

"Eight! what are you thinking about? You surely do not mean to let the child dine at eight o'clock? It would ruin his stomach. Just suppose that he only had his mother to look after him! She cares a great deal about her child. Oh, yes, we will speak about her; she is a mother! What a pity it is that there should be any mothers like her!"

Parent thought it was time to cut short a threatened scene. "Julie," he said, "I will not allow you to speak like that of your mistress. You understand me, do you not? Do not forget it in the future."

The old servant, who was nearly choked with surprise, turned and went out, slamming the door so violently after her that the lustres on the chandelier rattled, and for some seconds it sounded as if a number of little invisible bells were ringing in the drawing-room.

Eight o'clock struck, the door opened, and Julie came in again. She had lost her look of exasperation, but now she put on an air of cold and determined resolution, which was still more formidable.

"Monsieur," she said, "I served your mother until the day of her death, and I have attended to you from your birth until now, and I think it may be said that I am devoted to the family." She waited for a reply, and Parent stammered:

"Why, yes, certainly, my good Julie."

"You know quite well," she continued, "that I have never done anything for the sake of money, but always for your sake; that I have never de-

ceived you nor lied to you, that you have never had to find fault with me——"

"Certainly, my good Julie."

"Very well, then, monsieur; it cannot go on any longer like this. I have said nothing, and left you in your ignorance, out of respect and liking for you, but it is too much, and every one in the neighborhood is laughing at you. Everybody knows about it, and so I must tell you also, although I do not like to repeat it. The reason why madame comes in at any time she chooses is that she is doing abominable things."

He seemed stupefied and not to understand, and could only stammer out: "Hold your tongue; you know I have forbidden you——"

But she interrupted him with irresistible resolution. "No, monsieur, I must tell you everything now. For a long time madame has been carrying on with Monsieur Limousin. I have seen them kiss scores of times behind the door. Ah! you may be sure that if Monsieur Limousin had been rich, madame would neved have married Monsieur Parent. If you remember how the marriage was brought about, you would understand the matter from beginning to end."

Parent had risen, and stammered out, his face livid: "Hold your tongue—hold your tongue, or——"

She went on, however: "No, I mean to tell you everything. She married you from interest, and she deceived you from the very first day. It was all settled between them beforehand. You need only reflect for a few moments to understand it, and then, as she was not satisfied with having married

you, as she did not love you, she has made your life miserable, so miserable that it has almost broken my heart when I have seen it."

He walked up and down the room with hands clenched, repeating: "Hold your tongue—hold your tongue——" For he could find nothing else to say. The old servant, however, would not yield; she seemed resolved on everything.

George, who had been at first astonished and then frightened at those angry voices, began to utter shrill screams, and remained behind his father, with his face puckered up and his mouth open, roaring.

His son's screams exasperated Parent, and filled him with rage and courage. He rushed at Julie with both arms raised, ready to strike her, exclaiming: "Ah! you wretch. You will drive the child out of his senses." He already had his hand on her, when she screamed in his face:

"Monsieur, you may beat me if you like, me who reared you, but that will not prevent your wife from deceiving you, or alter the fact that your child is not yours——"

He stopped suddenly, let his arms fall, and remained standing opposite to her, so overwhelmed that he could understand nothing more.

"You need only to look at the child," she added, "to know who is its father! He is the very image of Monsieur Limousin. You need only look at his eyes and forehead. Why, a blind man could not be mistaken in him."

He had taken her by the shoulders, and was now shaking her with all his might. "Viper, viper!"

he said. "Go out the room, viper! Go out, or I shall kill you! Go out! Go out!"

And with a desperate effort he threw her into the next room. She fell across the table, which was laid for dinner, breaking the glasses. Then, rising to her feet, she put the table between her master and herself. While he was pursuing her, in order to take hold of her again, she flung terrible words at him.

"You need only go out this evening after dinner, and come in again immediately, and you will see! You will see whether I have been lying! Just try it, and you will see." She had reached the kitchen door and escaped, but he ran after her, up the back stairs to her bedroom, into which she had locked herself, and knocking at the door, he said:

"You will leave my house this very instant!"

"You may be certain of that, monsieur," was her reply. "In an hour's time I shall not be here any longer."

He then went slowly downstairs again, holding on to the banister so as not to fall, and went back to the drawing-room, where little George was sitting on the floor, crying. He fell into a chair, and looked at the child with dull eyes. He understood nothing, knew nothing more; he felt dazed, stupefied, mad, as if he had just fallen on his head, and he scarcely even remembered the dreadful things the servant had told him. Then, by degrees, his mind, like muddy water, became calmer and clearer, and the abominable revelations began to work in his heart.

He was no longer thinking of George. The child was quiet now and sitting on the carpet; but, seeing

that no notice was being taken of him, he began to cry. His father ran to him, took him in his arms, and covered him with kisses. His child remained to him, at any rate! What did the rest matter? He held him in his arms and pressed his lips to his light hair, and, relieved and composed, he whispered:

"George — my little George — my dear little George——" But he suddenly remembered what Julie had said! Yes, she had said that he was Limousin's child. Oh! it could not be possible, surely. He could not believe it, could not doubt, even for a moment, that he was his own child. It was one of those low scandals which spring from servants' brains! And he repeated: "George—my dear little George." The youngster was quiet again, now that his father was fondling him.

Parent felt the warmth of the little chest penetrate through his clothes, and it filled him with love, courage, and happiness; that gentle warmth soothed him, fortified him and saved him. Then he put the small, curly head away from him a little, and looked at it affectionately, still repeating: "George! Oh, my little George!" But suddenly he thought: "Suppose he were to resemble Limousin, after all!"

He looked at him with haggard, troubled eyes, and tried to discover whether there was any likeness in his forehead, in his nose, mouth, or cheeks. His thoughts wandered as they do when a person is going mad, and his child's face changed in his eyes, and assumed a strange look and improbable resemblances.

The hall bell rang. Parent gave a bound as if a bullet had gone through him. "There she is," he

said. "What shall I do?" And he ran and locked himself up in his room, to have time to bathe his eyes. But in a few moments another ring at the bell made him jump again, and then he remembered that Julie had left, without the housemaid knowing it, and so nobody would go to open the door. What was he to do? He went himself, and suddenly he felt brave, resolute, ready for dissimulation and the struggle. The terrible blow had matured him in a few moments. He wished to know the truth, he desired it with the rage of a timid man, and with the tenacity of an easy-going man who has been exasperated.

Nevertheless, he trembled. Does one know how much excited cowardice there often is in boldness? He went to the door with furtive steps, and stopped to listen; his heart beat furiously. Suddenly, however, the noise of the bell over his head startled him like an explosion. He seized the lock, turned the key, and opening the door, saw his wife and Limousin standing before him on the stairs.

With an air of astonishment, which also betrayed a little irritation, she said:

"So you open the door now? Where is Julie?"

His throat felt tight and his breathing was labored as he tried to reply, without being able to utter a word.

"Are you dumb?" she continued. "I asked you where Julie is?"

"She—she—has—gone——" he managed to stammer.

His wife began to get angry. "What do you mean by gone? Where has she gone? Why?" By degrees he regained his coolness. He felt an in-

tense hatred rise up in him for that insolent woman who was standing before him.

"Yes, she has gone altogether. I sent her away."

"You have sent away Julie? Why, you must be mad."

"Yes, I sent her away because she was insolent, and because—because she was ill-using the child."

"Julie?"

"Yes—Julie."

"What was she insolent about?"

"About you."

"About me?"

"Yes, because the dinner was burnt, and you did not come in."

"And she said——"

"She said—offensive things about you—which I ought not—which I could not listen to——"

"What did she say?"

"It is no good repeating them."

"I want to hear them."

"She said it was unfortunate for a man like me to be married to a woman like you, unpunctual, careless, disorderly, a bad mother, and a bad wife."

The young woman had gone into the anteroom, followed by Limousin, who did not say a word at this unexpected condition of things. She shut the door quickly, threw her cloak on a chair, and going straight up to her husband, she stammered out:

"You say? You say? That I am——"

Very pale and calm, he replied: "I say nothing, my dear. I am simply repeating what Julie said to me, as you wanted to know what it was, and I wish

you to remark that I turned her off just on account of what she said."

She trembled with a violent longing to tear out his beard and scratch his face. In his voice and manner she felt that he was asserting his position as master. Although she had nothing to say by way of reply, she tried to assume the offensive by saying something unpleasant. "I suppose you have had dinner?" she asked.

"No, I waited for you."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "It is very stupid of you to wait after half-past seven," she said. "You might have guessed that I was detained, that I had a good many things to do, visits and shopping."

And then, suddenly, she felt that she wanted to explain how she had spent her time, and told him in abrupt, haughty words that, having to buy some furniture in a shop a long distance off, very far off, in the Rue de Rennes, she had met Limousin at past seven o'clock on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, and that then she had gone with him to have something to eat in a restaurant, as she did not like to go to one by herself, although she was faint with hunger. That was how she had dined with Limousin, if it could be called dining, for they had only some soup and half a chicken, as they were in a great hurry to get back.

Parent replied simply: "Well, you were quite right. I am not finding fault with you."

Then Limousin, who had not spoken till then, and who had been half hidden behind Henriette, came forward and put out his hand, saying: "Are you very well?"

Parent took his hand, and shaking it gently, replied: "Yes, I am very well."

But the young woman had felt a reproach in her husband's last words. "Finding fault! Why do you speak of finding fault? One might think that you meant to imply something."

"Not at all," he replied, by way of excuse. "I simply meant that I was not at all anxious although you were late, and that I did not find fault with you for it."

She, however, took the high hand, and tried to find a pretext for a quarrel. "Although I was late? One might really think that it was one o'clock in the morning, and that I spent my nights away from home."

"Certainly not, my dear. I said late because I could find no other word. You said you should be back at half-past six, and you returned at half-past eight. That was surely being late. I understand it perfectly well. I am not at all surprised, even. But—but—I can hardly use any other word."

"But you pronounce them as if I had been out all night."

"Oh, no—oh, no!"

She saw that he would yield on every point, and she was going into her own room, when at last she noticed that George was screaming, and then she asked, with some feeling: "What is the matter with the child?"

"I told you that Julie had been rather unkind to him."

"What has the wretch been doing to him?"

"Oh, nothing much. She gave him a push, and he fell down."

She wanted to see her child, and ran into the dining room, but stopped short at the sight of the table covered with spilt wine, with broken decanters and glasses and overturned saltcellars. "Who did all that mischief?" she asked.

"It was Julie, who——" But she interrupted him furiously:

"That is too much, really! Julie speaks of me as if I were a shameless woman, beats my child, breaks my plates and dishes, turns my house upside down, and it appears that you think it all quite natural."

"Certainly not, as I have got rid of her."

"Really! You have got rid of her! But you ought to have given her in charge. In such cases, one ought to call in the Commissary of Police!"

"But—my dear—I really could not. There was no reason. It would have been very difficult——"

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "There! you will never be anything but a poor, wretched fellow, a man without a will, without any firmness or energy. Ah! she must have said some nice things to you, your Julie, to make you turn her off like that. I should like to have been here for a minute, only for a minute." Then she opened the drawing-room door and ran to George, took him into her arms and kissed him, and said: "Georgie, what is it, my darling, my pretty one, my treasure?"

Then, suddenly turning to another idea, she said: "But the child has had no dinner? You have had nothing to eat, my pet?"

"No, mamma."

Then she again turned furiously upon her hus-

band. "Why, you must be mad, utterly mad! It is half-past eight, and George has had no dinner!"

He excused himself as best he could, for he had nearly lost his wits through the overwhelming scene and the explanation, and felt crushed by this ruin of his life. "But, my dear, we were waiting for you, as I did not wish to dine without you. As you come home late every day, I expected you every moment."

She threw her bonnet, which she had kept on till then, into an easy-chair, and in an angry voice she said: "It is really intolerable to have to do with people who can understand nothing, who can divine nothing and do nothing by themselves. So, I suppose, if I were to come in at twelve o'clock at night, the child would have had nothing to eat? Just as if you could not have understood that, as it was after half-past seven, I was prevented from coming home, that I had met with some hindrance!"

Parent trembled, for he felt that his anger was getting the upper hand, but Limousin interposed, and turning toward the young woman, said:

"My dear friend, you are altogether unjust. Parent could not guess that you would come here so late, as you never do so, and then, how could you expect him to get over the difficulty all by himself, after having sent away Julie?"

But Henriette was very angry, and replied:

"Well, at any rate, he must get over the difficulty himself, for I will not help him," she replied. "Let him settle it!" And she went into her own room, quite forgetting that her child had not had anything to eat.

Limousin immediately set to work to help his

friend. He picked up the broken glasses which strewed the table and took them out, replaced the plates and knives and forks, and put the child into his high chair, while Parent went to look for the chambermaid to wait at table. The girl came in, in great astonishment, as she had heard nothing in George's room, where she had been working. She soon, however, brought in the soup, a burnt leg of mutton, and mashed potatoes.

Parent sat by the side of the child, very much upset and distressed at all that had happened. He gave the boy his dinner, and endeavored to eat something himself, but he could only swallow with an effort, as his throat felt paralyzed. By degrees he was seized with an insane desire to look at Limousin, who was sitting opposite to him, making bread pellets, to see whether George was like him, but he did not venture to raise his eyes for some time. At last, however, he made up his mind to do so, and gave a quick, sharp look at the face which he knew so well, although he almost fancied that he had never examined it carefully. It looked so different to what he had imagined. From time to time he looked at Limousin, trying to recognize a likeness in the smallest lines of his face, in the the slightest features, and then he looked at his son, under the pretext of feeding him.

Two words were sounding in his ears: "His father! his father! his father!" They buzzed in his temples at every beat of his heart. Yes, that man, that tranquil man who was sitting on the other side of the table, was, perhaps, the father of his son, of George, of his little George. Parent left off eating; he could not swallow any more. A ter-

rible pain, one of those attacks of pain which make men scream, roll on the ground, and bite the furniture, was tearing at his entrails, and he felt inclined to take a knife and plunge it into his stomach.

He started when he heard the door open. His wife came in. "I am hungry," she said; "are not you, Limousin?"

He hesitated a little, and then said: "Yes, I am, upon my word."

She had the leg of mutton brought in again. Parent asked himself:

"Have they had dinner? Or are they late because they have had a lovers' meeting?"

They both ate with a very good appetite. Henriette was very calm, but laughed and joked. Her husband watched her furtively. She had on a pink teagown trimmed with white lace, and her fair head, her white neck and her plump hands stood out from that coquettish and perfumed dress as though it were a sea shell edged with foam.

What fun they must be making of him, if he had been their dupe since the first day! Was it possible to make a fool of a man, of a worthy man, because his father had left him a little money? Why could one not see into people's souls? How was it that nothing revealed to upright hearts the deceits of infamous hearts? How was it that voices had the same sound for adoring as for lying? Why was a false, deceptive look the same as a sincere one? And he watched them, waiting to catch a gesture, a word, an intonation. Then suddenly he thought: "I will surprise them this evening," and he said: "My dear, as I have dismissed Julie, I will see about getting another girl this very day. I will go

at once to procure one by to-morrow morning, so I may not be in until late."

"Very well," she replied; "go. I shall not stir from here. Limousin will keep me company. We will wait for you." Then, turning to the maid, she said: "You had better put George to bed, and then you can clear away and go up to your room."

Parent had got up; he was unsteady on his legs, dazed and bewildered, and saying, "I shall see you again later on," he went out, holding on to the wall, for the floor seemed to roll like a ship. George had been carried out by his nurse, while Henriette and Limousin went into the drawing-room.

As soon as the door was shut, he said: "You must be mad, surely, to torment your husband as you do?"

She immediately turned on him: "Ah! Do you know that I think the habit you have got into lately, of looking upon Parent as a martyr, is very unpleasant?"

Limousin threw himself into an easy-chair and crossed his legs. "I am not setting him up as a martyr in the least, but I think that, situated as we are, it is ridiculous to defy this man as you do, from morning till night."

She took a cigarette from the mantelpiece, lighted it, and replied: "But I do not defy him; quite the contrary. Only he irritates me by his stupidity, and I treat him as he deserves."

Limousin continued impatiently: "What you are doing is very foolish! I am only asking you to treat your husband gently, because we both of us require him to trust us. I think that you ought to see that."

They were close together: he, tall, dark, with long whiskers and the rather vulgar manners of a good-looking man who is very well satisfied with himself; she, small, fair, and pink, a little Parisian, born in the back room of a shop, half cocotte and half bourgeoise, brought up to entice customers to the store by her glances, and married, in consequence, to a simple, unsophisticated man, who saw her outside the door every morning when he went out and every evening when he came home.

"But do you not understand, you great booby," she said, "that I hate him just because he married me, because he bought me, in fact; because everything that he says and does, everything that he thinks, acts on my nerves? He exasperates me every moment by his stupidity, which you call his kindness; by his dullness, which you call his confidence, and then, above all, because he is my husband, instead of you. I feel him between us, although he does not interfere with us much. And then—and then! No, it is, after all, too idiotic of him not to guess anything! I wish he would, at any rate, be a little jealous. There are moments when I feel inclined to say to him: 'Do you not see, you stupid creature, that Paul is my lover?'

"It is quite incomprehensible that you cannot understand how hateful he is to me, how he irritates me. You always seem to like him, and you shake hands with him cordially. Men are very extraordinary at times."

"One must know how to dissimulate, my dear."

"It is no question of dissimulation, but of feeling. One might think that, when you men deceive one another, you like each other better on that ac-

count, while we women hate a man from the moment that we have betrayed him."

"I do not see why one should hate an excellent fellow because one is friendly with his wife."

"You do not see it? You do not see it? You all of you are wanting in refinement of feeling. However, that is one of those things which one feels and cannot express. And then, moreover, one ought not. No, you would not understand; it is quite useless! You men have no delicacy of feeling."

And smiling, with the gentle contempt of an impure woman, she put both her hands on his shoulders and held up her lips to him. He stooped down and clasped her closely in his arms, and their lips met. And as they stood in front of the mantel mirror, another couple exactly like them embraced behind the clock.

They had heard nothing, neither the noise of the key nor the creaking of the door, but suddenly Henriette, with a loud cry, pushed Limousin away with both her arms, and they saw Parent looking at them, livid with rage, without his shoes on and his hat over his forehead. He looked at each, one after the other, with a quick glance of his eyes and without moving his head. He appeared beside himself. Then, without saying a word, he threw himself on Limousin, seized him as if he were going to strangle him, and flung him into the opposite corner of the room so violently that the other lost his balance, and, beating the air with his hand, struck his head violently against the wall.

When Henriette saw that her husband was going to murder her lover, she threw herself on Parent,

seized him by the neck, and digging her ten delicate, rosy fingers into his neck, she squeezed him so tightly, with all the vigor of a desperate woman, that the blood spurted out under her nails, and she bit his shoulder, as if she wished to tear it with her teeth. Parent, half-strangled and choking, loosened his hold on Limousin, in order to shake off his wife, who was hanging to his neck. Putting his arms round her waist, he flung her also to the other end of the drawing-room.

Then, as his passion was short-lived, like that of most good-tempered men, and his strength was soon exhausted, he remained standing between the two, panting, worn out, not knowing what to do next. His brutal fury had expended itself in that effort, like the froth of a bottle of champagne, and his unwonted energy ended in a gasping for breath. As soon as he could speak, however, he said:

"Go away—both of you—immediately! Go away!"

Limousin remained motionless in his corner, against the wall, too startled to understand anything as yet, too frightened to move a finger; while Henriette, with her hands resting on a small, round table, her head bent forward, her hair hanging down, the bodice of her dress unfastened, waited like a wild animal which is about to spring. Parent continued in a stronger voice: "Go away immediately. Get out of the house!"

His wife, however, seeing that he had got over his first exasperation, grew bolder, drew herself up, took two steps toward him, and, grown almost insolent, she said: "Have you lost your head? What

is the matter with you? What is the meaning of this unjustifiable violence?"

But he turned toward her, and raising his fist to strike her, he stammered out: "Oh—oh—this is too much, too much! I heard everything! Everything—do you understand? Everything! You wretch—you wretch! You are two wretches! Get out of the house, both of you! Immediately, or I shall kill you! Leave the house!"

She saw that it was all over, and that he knew everything; that she could not prove her innocence, and that she must comply. But all her impudence had returned to her, and her hatred for the man, which was aggravated now, drove her to audacity, made her feel the need of bravado, and of defying him, and she said in a clear voice: "Come, Limousin; as he is going to turn me out of doors, I will go to your lodgings with you."

But Limousin did not move, and Parent, in a fresh access of rage, cried out: "Go, will you? Go, you wretches! Or else—or else——" He seized a chair and whirled it over his head.

Henriette walked quickly across the room, took her lover by the arm, dragged him from the wall, to which he appeared fixed, and led him toward the door, saying: "Do come, my friend—you see that the man is mad. Do come!"

As she went out she turned round to her husband, trying to think of something that she could do, something that she could invent to wound him to the heart as she left the house, and an idea struck her, one of those venomous, deadly ideas in which all a woman's perfidy shows itself, and she said resolutely: "I am going to take my child with me."

Parent was stupefied, and stammered: "Your—your—child? You dare to talk of your child? You venture—you venture to ask for your child—after—after—— Oh, oh, that is too much! Go, you vile creature! Go!"

She went up to him again, almost smiling, almost avenged already, and defying him, standing close to him, and face to face, she said: "I want my child, and you have no right to keep him, because he is not yours—do you understand? He is not yours! He is Limousin's!"

And Parent cried out in bewilderment: "You lie—you lie—worthless woman!"

But she continued: "You fool! Everybody knows it except you. I tell you, this is his father. You need only look at him to see it."

Parent staggered backward, and then he suddenly turned round, took a candle, and rushed into the next room; returning almost immediately, carrying little George wrapped up in his bedclothes. The child, who had been suddenly awakened, was crying from fright. Parent threw him into his wife's arms, and then, without speaking, he pushed her roughly out toward the stairs, where Limousin was waiting, from motives of prudence.

Then he shut the door again, double-locked and bolted it, but had scarcely got back into the drawing-room when he fell to the floor at full length.

## II.

Parent lived alone, quite alone. During the five weeks that followed their separation, the feeling of surprise at his new life prevented him from think-

ing much. He had resumed his bachelor life, his habits of lounging about, and took his meals at a restaurant, as he had done formerly. As he wished to avoid any scandal, he made his wife an allowance, which was arranged by their lawyers. By degrees, however, the thought of the child began to haunt him. Often, when he was at home alone at night, he suddenly thought he heard George calling out "Papa," and his heart would begin to beat, and he would get up quickly and open the door, to see whether, by chance, the child might have returned, as dogs or pigeons do. Why should a child have less instinct than an animal? On finding that he was mistaken, he would sit down in his armchair again and think of the boy. He would think of him for hours and whole days. It was not only a moral, but still more a physical obsession, a nervous longing to kiss him, to hold and fondle him, to take him on his knees and dance him. He felt the child's little arms around his neck, his little mouth pressing a kiss on his beard, his soft hair tickling his cheeks, and the remembrance of all those childish ways made him suffer as a man might for some beloved woman who has left him. Twenty or a hundred times a day he asked himself the question whether he was or was not George's father, and almost before he was in bed every night he recommenced the same series of despairing questionings.

He especially dreaded the darkness of the evening, the melancholy feeling of the twilight. Then a flood of sorrow invaded his heart, a torrent of despair which seemed to overwhelm him and drive him mad. He was as afraid of his own thoughts as men are of criminals, and he fled before them as one

does from wild beasts. Above all things, he feared his empty, dark, horrible dwelling and the deserted streets, in which, here and there, a gas lamp flickered, where the isolated foot passenger whom one hears in the distance seems to be a night prowler, and makes one walk faster or slower, according to whether he is coming toward you or following you.

And in spite of himself, and by instinct, Parent went in the direction of the broad, well-lighted, populous streets. The light and the crowd attracted him, occupied his mind and distracted his thoughts, and when he was tired of walking aimlessly about among the moving crowd, when he saw the foot passengers becoming more scarce and the pavements less crowded, the fear of solitude and silence drove him into some large café full of drinkers and of light. He went there as flies go to a candle, and he would sit down at one of the little round tables and ask for a "bock," which he would drink slowly, feeling uneasy every time a customer got up to go. He would have liked to take him by the arm, hold him back, and beg him to stay a little longer, so much did he dread the time when the waiter should come up to him and say sharply: "Come, monsieur, it is closing time!"

He thus got into the habit of going to the beer houses, where the continual elbowing of the drinkers brings you in contact with a familiar and silent public, where the heavy clouds of tobacco smoke lull disquietude, while the heavy beer dulls the mind and calms the heart. He almost lived there. He was scarcely up before he went there to find people to distract his glances and his thoughts, and soon, as he felt too lazy to move, he took his meals there.

After every meal, during more than an hour, he sipped three or four small glasses of brandy, which stupefied him by degrees, and then his head drooped on his chest, he shut his eyes, and went to sleep. Then, awaking, he raised himself on the red velvet seat, straightened his waistcoat, pulled down his cuffs, and took up the newspapers again, though he had already seen them in the morning, and read them all through again, from beginning to end. Between four and five o'clock he went for a walk on the boulevards, to get a little fresh air, as he used to say, and then came back to the seat which had been reserved for him, and asked for his absinthe. He would talk to the regular customers whose acquaintance he had made. They discussed the news of the day and political events, and that carried him on till dinner time; and he spent the evening as he had the afternoon, until it was time to close. That was a terible moment for him when he was obliged to go out into the dark, into his empty room full of dreadful recollections, of horrible thoughts, and of mental agony. He no longer saw any of his old friends, none of his relatives, nobody who might remind him of his past life. But as his apartments were a hell to him, he took a room in a large hotel, a good room on the ground floor, so as to see the passers-by. He was no longer alone in that great building. He felt people swarming round him, he heard voices in the adjoining rooms, and when his former sufferings tormented him too much at the sight of his bed, which was turned down, and of his solitary fireplace, he went out into the wide passages and walked up and down them like a sentinel, before all the closed doors, and looked sadly at the

shoes standing in couples outside them, women's little boots by the side of men's thick ones, and he thought that, no doubt, all these people were happy, and were sleeping in their warm beds.

Five years passed thus; five miserable years. But one day, when he was taking his usual walk between the Madeleine and the Rue Drouot, he suddenly saw a lady whose bearing struck him. A tall gentleman and a child were with her, and all three were walking in front of him. He asked himself where he had seen them before, when suddenly he recognized a movement of her hand; it was his wife, his wife with Limousin and his child, his little George.

His heart beat as if it would suffocate him, but he did not stop, for he wished to see them, and he followed them. They looked like a family of the better middle class. Henriette was leaning on Paul's arm, and speaking to him in a low voice, and looking at him sideways occasionally. Parent got a side view of her and recognized her pretty features, the movements of her lips, her smile, and her coaxing glances. But the child chiefly took up his attention. How tall and strong he was! Parent could not see his face, but only his long, fair curls. That tall boy with bare legs, who was walking by his mother's side like a little man, was George.

He saw them suddenly, all three, as they stopped in front of a shop. Limousin had grown very gray, had aged and was thinner; his wife, on the contrary, was as young looking as ever, and had grown stouter. George he would not have recognized, he was so different from what he had been formerly.

They went on again, and Parent followed them.

He walked on quickly, passed them, and then turned round, so as to meet them face to face. As he passed the child he felt a mad longing to take him into his arms and run off with him, and he knocked against him as if by accident. The boy turned round and looked at the clumsy man angrily, and Parent hurried away, shocked, hurt, and pursued by that look. He went off like a thief, seized with a horrible fear lest he should have been seen and recognized by his wife and her lover. He went to his café without stopping, and fell breathless into his chair. That evening he drank three absinthes.

For four months he felt the pain of that meeting in his heart. Every night he saw the three again, happy and tranquil, father, mother, and child walking on the boulevard before going in to dinner, and that new vision effaced the old one. It was another matter, another hallucination now, and also a fresh pain. Little George, his little George, the child he had so much loved and so often kissed, disappeared in the far distance, and he saw a new one, like a brother of the first, a little boy with bare legs, who did not know him! He suffered terribly at that thought. The child's love was dead; there was no bond between them; the child would not have held out his arms when he saw him. He had even looked at him angrily.

Then, by degrees he grew calmer, his mental torture diminished, the image that had appeared to his eyes and which haunted his nights became more indistinct and less frequent. He began once more to live nearly like everybody else, like all those idle people who drink beer off marble-topped tables and

wear out their clothes on the threadbare velvet of the couches.

He grew old amid the smoke from pipes, lost his hair under the gas lights, looked upon his weekly bath, on his fortnightly visit to the barber's to have his hair cut, and on the purchase of a new coat or hat as an event. When he got to his café in a new hat he would look at himself in the glass for a long time before sitting down, and take it off and put it on again several times, and at last ask his friend, the lady at the bar, who was watching him with interest, whether she thought it suited him.

Two or three times a year he went to the theatre, and in the summer he sometimes spent his evenings at one of the open-air concerts in the Champs-Elysées. And so the years followed each other, slow, monotonous, and short, because they were quite uneventful.

He very rarely now thought of the dreadful drama which had wrecked his life; for twenty years had passed since that terrible evening. But the life he had led since then had worn him out. The landlord of his café would often say to him: "You ought to pull yourself together a little, Monsieur Parent; you should get some fresh air and go into the country. I assure you that you have changed very much within the last few months." And when his customer had gone out he used to say to the barmaid: "That poor Monsieur Parent is booked for another world; it is bad never to get out of Paris. Advise him to go out of town for a day occasionally; he has confidence in you. Summer will soon be here; that will put him straight."

And she, full of pity and kindness for such a

regular customer, said to Parent every day: "Come, monsieur, make up your mind to get a little fresh air. It is so charming in the country when the weather is fine. Oh, if I could, I would spend my life there!"

By degrees he was seized with a vague desire to go just once and see whether it was really as pleasant there as she said, outside the walls of the great city. One morning he said to her:

"Do you know where one can get a good luncheon in the neighborhood of Paris?"

"Go to the Terrace at Saint-Germain; it is delightful there!"

He had been there formerly, just when he became engaged. He made up his mind to go there again, and he chose a Sunday, for no special reason, but merely because people generally do go out on Sundays, even when they have nothing to do all the week; and so one Sunday morning he went to Saint-Germain. He felt low-spirited and vexed at having yielded to that new longing, and at having broken through his usual habits. He was thirsty; he would have liked to get out at every station and sit down in the café which he saw outside and drink a "bock" or two, and then take the first train back to Paris. The journey seemed very long to him. He could remain sitting for whole days, as long as he had the same motionless objects before his eyes, but he found it very trying and fatiguing to remain sitting while he was being whirled along, and to see the whole country fly by, while he himself was motionless.

However, he found the Seine interesting every time he crossed it. Under the bridge at Chatou he

saw some small boats going at great speed under the vigorous strokes of the bare-armed oarsmen, and he thought: "There are some fellows who are certainly enjoying themselves!" The train entered the tunnel just before you get to the station at Saint-Germain, and presently stopped at the platform. Parent got out, and walked slowly, for he already felt tired, toward the Terrace, with his hands behind his back, and when he got to the iron balustrade, stopped to look at the distant horizon. The immense plain spread out before him vast as the sea, green and studded with large villages, almost as populous as towns. The sun bathed the whole landscape in its full, warm light. The Seine wound like an endless serpent through the plain, flowed round the villages and along the slopes. Parent inhaled the warm breeze, which seemed to make his heart young again, to enliven his spirits, and to vivify his blood, and said to himself:

"Why, it is delightful here."

Then he went on a few steps, and stopped again to look about him. The utter misery of his existence seemed to be brought into full relief by the intense light which inundated the landscape. He saw his twenty years of café life—dull, monotonous, heart-breaking. He might have traveled as others did, have gone among foreigners, to unknown countries beyond the sea, have interested himself somewhat in everything which other men are passionately devoted to, in arts and science; he might have enjoyed life in a thousand forms, that mysterious life which is either charming or painful, constantly changing, always inexplicable and strange. Now, however, it was too late. He would go on drinking "bock"

after "bock" until he died, without any family, without friends, without hope, without any curiosity about anything, and he was seized with a feeling of misery and a wish to run away, to hide himself in Paris, in his café and his lethargy! All the thoughts, all the dreams, all the desires which are dormant in the slough of stagnating hearts had reawakened, brought to life by those rays of sunlight on the plain.

Parent felt that if he were to remain there any longer he should lose his reason, and he made haste to get to the Pavillon Henri IV for lunch, to try and forget his troubles under the influence of wine and alcohol, and at any rate to have some one to speak to.

He took a small table in one of the arbors, from which one can see all the surrounding country, ordered his lunch, and asked to be served at once. Then some more people arrived and sat down at tables near him. He felt more comfortable; he was no longer alone. Three persons were eating luncheon near him. He looked at them two or three times without seeing them clearly, as one looks at total strangers. Suddenly a woman's voice sent a shiver through him which seemed to penetrate to his very marrow.

"George," it said, "will you carve the chicken?"

And another voice replied: "Yes, mamma."

Parent looked up, and he understood; he guessed immediately who those people were! He should certainly not have known them again. His wife had grown quite white and very stout, an elderly, serious, respectable lady, and she held her head forward as she ate for fear of spotting her dress, although

she had a table napkin tucked under her chin. George had become a man. He had a slight beard, that uneven and almost colorless beard which adorns the cheeks of youths. He wore a high hat, a white waistcoat, and a monocle, because it looked swell, no doubt. Parent looked at him in astonishment. Was that George, his son? No, he did not know that young man; there could be nothing in common between them. Limousin had his back to him, and was eating, with his shoulders rather bent.

All three of them seemed happy and satisfied; they came and took luncheon in the country at well-known restaurants. They had had a calm and pleasant existence, a family existence in a warm and comfortable house, filled with all those trifles which make life agreeable, with affection, with all those tender words which people exchange continually when they love each other. They had lived thus, thanks to him, Parent, on his money, after having deceived him, robbed him, ruined him! They had condemned him, the innocent, simple-minded, jovial man, to all the miseries of solitude, to that abominable life which he had led between the pavement and a bar-room, to every mental torture and every physical misery! They had made him a useless, aimless being, a waif in the world, a poor old man without any pleasures, any prospects, expecting nothing from anybody or anything. For him, the world was empty, because he loved nothing in the world. He might go among other nations, or go about the streets, go into all the houses in Paris, open every room, but he would not find inside any door the beloved face, the face of wife or child which smiles when it sees you. This idea worked

upon him more than any other, the idea of a door which one opens, to see and to embrace somebody behind it.

And that was the fault of those three wretches! The fault of that worthless woman, of that infamous friend, and of that tall, light-haired lad who put on insolent airs. Now he felt as angry with the child as he did with the other two. Was he not Limousin's son? Would Limousin have kept him and loved him otherwise? Would not Limousin very quickly have got rid of the mother and of the child if he had not felt sure that it was his, positively his? Does anybody bring up other people's children? And now they were there, quite close to him, those three who had made him suffer so much.

Parent looked at them, irritated and excited at the recollection of all his sufferings and of his despair, and was especially exasperated at their placid and satisfied looks. He felt inclined to kill them, to throw his siphon of Seltzer water at them, to split open Limousin's head as he every moment bent it over his plate, raising it again immediately.

He would have his revenge now, on the spot, as he had them under his hand. But how? He tried to think of some means, he pictured such dreadful things as one reads of in the newspapers occasionally, but could not hit on anything practical. And he went on drinking to excite himself, to give himself courage not to allow such an opportunity to escape him, as he might never have another.

Suddenly an idea struck him, a terrible idea; and he left off drinking to mature it. He smiled as he murmured: "I have them, I have them! We will see; we will see!"

They finished their luncheon slowly, conversing with perfect unconcern. Parent could not hear what they were saying, but he saw their quiet gestures. His wife's face especially exasperated him. She had assumed a haughty air, the air of a comfortable, devout woman, of an unapproachable, devout woman, sheathed in principles, iron-clad in virtue. They paid their bill and got up from table. Parent then noticed Limousin. He might have been taken for a retired diplomat, for he looked a man of great importance, with his soft white whiskers, the tips of which touched his coat collar.

They walked away. Parent rose and followed them. First they went up and down the terrace, and calmly admired the landscape, and then they went into the forest. Parent followed them at a distance, hiding himself so as not to excite their suspicion too soon.

Parent came up to them by degrees, breathing hard with emotion and fatigue, for he was unused to walking now. He soon came up to them, but was seized with fear, an inexplicable fear, and he passed them, so as to turn round and meet them face to face. He walked on, his heart beating, feeling that they were just behind him now, and he said to himself: "Come, now is the time. Courage! courage! Now is the moment!"

He turned round. They were all three sitting on the grass, at the foot of a huge tree, and were still chatting. He made up his mind, and walked back rapidly; stopping in front of them in the middle of the road, he siad abruptly, in a voice broken by emotion:

"It is I! Here I am! I suppose you did not expect me?"

They all three stared at this man, who seemed to be insane. He continued:

"One would suppose that you did not know me again. Just look at me! I am Parent, Henri Parent. You thought it was all over, and that you would never see me again. Ah! but here I am once more, you see, and now we will have an explanation."

Henriette, terrified, hid her face in her hands, murmuring: "Oh! Good heavens!"

Seeing this stranger, who seemed to be threatening his mother, George sprang up, ready to seize him by the collar. Limousin, thunderstruck, looked in horror at this apparition, who, after gasping for breath, continued:

"So now we will have an explanation; the proper moment has come! Ah! you deceived me, you condemned me to the life of a convict, and you thought that I should never catch you!"

The young man took him by the shoulders and pushed him back.

"Are you mad?" he asked. "What do you want? Go on your way immediately, or I shall give you a thrashing!"

"What do I want?" replied Parent. "I want to tell you who these people are."

George, however, was in a rage, and shook him, and was even going to strike him.

"Let me go," said Parent. "I am your father. There, see whether they recognize me now, the wretches!"

The young man, thunderstruck, unclenched his

fists and turned toward his mother. Parent, as soon as he was released, approached her.

"Well," he said, "tell him yourself who I am! Tell him that my name is Henri Parent, that I am his father because his name is George Parent, because you are my wife, because you are all three living on my money, on the allowance of ten thousand francs which I have made you since I drove you out of my house. Will you tell him also why I drove you out? Because I surprised you with this beggar, this wretch, your lover! Tell him what I was, an honorable man, whom you married for money, and whom you deceived from the very first day. Tell him who you are, and who I am——"

He stammered and gasped for breath in his rage. The woman exclaimed in a heartrending voice:

"Paul, Paul, stop him; make him be quiet! Do not let him say this before my son!"

Limousin had also risen to his feet. He said in a very low voice:

"Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! Do you understand what you are doing?"

"I quite know what I am doing," resumed Parent, "and that is not all. There is one thing that I will know, something that has tormented me for twenty years." Then, turning to George, who was leaning against a tree in consternation, he said:

"Listen to me. When she left my house she thought it was not enough to have deceived me, but she also wanted to drive me to despair. You were my only consolation, and she took you with her, swearing that I was not your father, but that he was your father. Was she lying? I do not know.

I have been asking myself the question for the last twenty years."

He went close up to her, tragic and terrible, and, pulling away her hands, with which she had covered her face, he continued:

"Well, now! I call upon you to tell me which of us two is the father of this young man; he or I, your husband or your lover. Come! Come! tell us."

Limousin rushed at him. Parent pushed him back, and, sneering in his fury, he said: "Ah! you are brave now! You are braver than you were that day when you ran downstairs because you thought I was going to murder you. Very well! If she will not reply, tell me yourself. You ought to know as well as she. Tell me, are you this young fellow's father? Come! Come! Tell me!"

He turned to his wife again.

"If you will not tell me, at any rate tell your son. He is a man, now, and he has the right to know who his father is. I do not know, and I never did know, never, never! I cannot tell you, my boy."

He seemed to be losing his senses; his voice grew shrill and he worked his arms about as if he had an epileptic fit.

"Come! . . . Give me an answer. . . . She does not know. . . . I will make a bet that she does not know. . . . No . . . she does not know, by Jove! . . . Ha! ha! ha! . . . Nobody knows . . . nobody. . . . How can one know such things? . . . You will not know either, my boy, you will not know any more than I do . . . never. . . . Look here. . . . Ask her . . . you will find that she does not know. . . . I do not know either . . . nor

does he, nor do you, nobody knows. You can choose . . . You can choose . . . yes, you can choose . . . him or me. . . . Choose. . . . Good evening. . . . It is all over. . . . If she makes up her mind to tell you, you will come and let me know, will you not? I am living at the Hôtel des Continents. . . . I should be glad to know. . . . Good evening. . . . I hope you will enjoy yourselves very much. . . .”

And he went away gesticulating, talking to himself under the tall trees, in the quiet, the cool air, which was full of the fragrance of growing plants. He did not turn round to look at them, but went straight on, walking under the stimulus of his rage, under a storm of passion, with that one fixed idea in his mind. All at once he found himself outside the station. A train was about to start and he got in. During the journey his anger calmed down, he regained his senses and returned to Paris, astonished at his own boldness, full of aches and pains as if he had broken some bones. Nevertheless, he went to have a “bock” at his brewery.

When she saw him come in, Mademoiselle Zoé asked in surprise: “What! back already? are you tired?”

“Yes—yes, I am tired . . . very tired. . . . You know, when one is not used to going out. . . . I've had enough of it. I shall not go into the country again. It would have been better to have stayed here. For the future, I shall not stir out.”

She could not persuade him to tell her about his little excursion, much as she wished to.

For the first time in his life he got thoroughly drunk that night, and had to be carried home.

# QUEEN HORTENSE

IN Argenteuil she was called Queen Hortense. No one knew why. Perhaps it was because she had a commanding tone of voice; perhaps because she was tall, bony, imperious; perhaps because she governed a kingdom of servants, chickens, dogs, cats, canaries, parrots, all so dear to an old maid's heart. But she did not spoil these familiar friends; she had for them none of those endearing names, none of the foolish tenderness which women seem to lavish on the soft fur of a purring cat. She governed these beasts with authority; she reigned.

She was indeed an old maid—one of those old maids with a harsh voice and angular motions, whose very soul seems to be hard. She never would stand contradiction, argument, hesitation, indifference, laziness nor fatigue. She had never been heard to complain, to regret anything, to envy anyone. She would say: "Everyone has his share," with the conviction of a fatalist. She did not go to church, she had no use for priests, she hardly believed in God, calling all religious things "weeper's wares."

For thirty years she had lived in her little house, with its tiny garden running along the street; she had never changed her habits, only changing her servants pitilessly, as soon as they reached twenty-one years of age.

When her dogs, cats and birds would die of old age, or from an accident, she would replace them

without tears and without regret; with a little spade she would bury the dead animal in a strip of ground, throwing a few shovelfuls of earth over it and stamping it down with her feet in an indifferent manner.

She had a few friends in town, families of clerks who went to Paris every day. Once in a while she would be invited out, in the evening, to tea. She would inevitably fall asleep, and she would have to be awakened, when it was time for her to go home. She never allowed anyone to accompany her, fearing neither light nor darkness. She did not appear to like children.

She kept herself busy doing countless masculine tasks—carpentering, gardening, sawing or chopping wood, even laying bricks when it was necessary.

She had relatives who came to see her twice a year, the Cimmes and the Colombels, her two sisters having married, one of them a florist and the other a retired merchant. The Cimmes had no children; the Colombels had three: Henri, Pauline and Joseph. Henri was twenty, Pauline seventeen and Joseph only three.

There was no love lost between the old maid and her relatives.

In the spring of the year 1882 Queen Hortense suddenly fell sick. The neighbors called in a physician, whom she immediately drove out. A priest then having presented himself, she jumped out of bed, in order to throw him out of the house.

The young servant, in despair, was brewing her some tea.

After lying in bed for three days the situation appeared so serious that the barrel-maker, who lived

next door, to the right, acting on advice from the doctor, who had forcibly returned to the house, took it upon himself to call together the two families.

They arrived by the same train, towards ten in the morning, the Colombels bringing little Joseph with them.

When they got to the garden gate, they saw the servant seated in the chair against the wall, crying.

The dog was sleeping on the door mat in the broiling sun; two cast, which looked as though they might be dead, were stretched out in front of the two windows, their eyes closed, their paws and tails stretched out at full length.

A big clucking hen was parading through the garden with a whole regiment of yellow, downy chicks, and a big cage hanging from the wall and covered with pimpernel, contained a population of birds which were chirping away in the warmth of this beautiful spring morning.

In another cage, shaped like a chalet, two lovebirds sat motionless side by side on their perch.

M. Cimme, a fat, puffing person, who always entered first everywhere, pushing aside everyone else, whether man or woman, when it was necessary, asked:

"Well, Céleste, aren't things going well?"

The little servant moaned through her tears:

"She doesn't even recognize me any more. The doctor says it's the end."

Everybody looked around.

Mme. Cimme and Mme. Colombel immediately embraced each other, without saying a word. They looked very much alike, having always worn their

hair in Madonna bands, and loud red French cashmere shawls.

Cimme turned to his brother-in-law, a pale, sallow-complexioned, thin man, wasted by stomach complaints, who limped badly, and said in a serious tone of voice:

"Gad! It was high time."

But no one dared to enter the dying woman's room on the ground floor. Even Cimme made way for the others. Colombel was the first to make up his mind, and, swaying from side to side like the mast of a ship, the iron ferule of his cane clattering on the paved hall, he entered.

The two women were the next to venture, and M. Cimmes closed the procession.

Little Joseph had remained outside, pleased at the sight of the dog.

A ray of sunlight seemed to cut the bed in two, shining just on the hands, which were moving nervously, continually opening and closing. The fingers were twitching as though moved by some thought, as though trying to point out a meaning or idea, as though obeying the dictates of a will. The rest of the body lay motionless under the sheets. The angular frame showed not a single movement. The eyes remained closed.

The family spread out in a semi-circle and, without a word, they began to watch the contracted chest and the short, gasping breathing. The little servant had followed them and was still crying.

At last Cimme asked:

"Exactly what did the doctor say?"

The girl stammered:

"He said to leave her alone, that nothing more could be done for her."

But suddenly the old woman's lips began to move. She seemed to be uttering silent words, words hidden in the brain of this dying being, and her hands quickened their peculiar movements

Then she began to speak in a thin, high voice, which no one had ever heard, a voice which seemed to come from the distance, perhaps from the depths of this heart which had always been closed.

Cimme, finding this scene painful, walked away on tiptoe. Colombel, whose crippled leg was growing tired, sat down.

The two women remained standing.

Queen Hortense was now babbling away, and no one could understand a word. She was pronouncing names, many names, tenderly calling imaginary people.

"Come here, Philippe, kiss your mother. Tell me, child, do you love your mamma? You, Rose, take care of your little sister while I am away. And don't leave her alone. Don't play with matches!"

She stopped for a while, then, in a louder voice, as though she were calling someone: "Henriette!" then waited a moment and continued:

"Tell your father that I wish to speak to him before he goes to business." And suddenly: "I am not feeling very well to-day, darling; promise not to come home late. Tell your employer that I am sick. You know, it isn't safe to leave the children alone when I am in bed. For dinner I will fix you up a nice dish of rice. The little ones like that very much. Won't Claire be happy?"

And she broke into a happy, joyous laugh, such

as they had never heard: "Look at Jean, how funny he looks! He has smeared jam all over his face, the little pig! Look, sweetheart, look; isn't he funny?"

Colombel, who was continually lifting his tired leg from place to place, muttered:

"She is dreaming that she has children and a husband; it is the beginning of the death agony."

The two sisters had not yet moved, surprised, astounded.

The little maid exclaimed:

"You must take off your shawls and your hats! Would you like to go into the parlor?"

They went out without having said a word. And Colombel followed them, limping, once more leaving the dying woman alone.

When they were relieved of their travelling garments, the women finally sat down. Then one of the cats left its window, stretched, jumped into the room and on to Mme. Cimme's knees. She began to pet it.

In the next room could be heard the voice of the dying woman, living, in this last hour, the life for which she had doubtless hoped, living her dreams themselves just when all was over for her.

Cimme, in the garden, was playing with little Joseph and the dog, enjoying himself in the wholehearted manner of a countryman, having completely forgotten the dying woman.

But suddenly he entered the house and said to the girl:

"I say, my girl, are we not going to have luncheon? What do you ladies wish to eat?"

They finally agreed on an omelet, a piece of steak with new potatoes, cheese and coffee.

As Mme. Colombel was fumbling in her pocket

for her purse, Cimme stopped her, and, turning to the maid: "Have you got any money?"

She answered:

"Yes, monsieur."

"How much?"

"Fifteen francs."

"That's enough. Hustle, my girl, because I am beginning to get very hungry."

Mme. Cimme, looking out over the climbing vines bathed in sunlight, and at the two turtle-doves on the roof opposite, said in an annoyed tone of voice:

"What a pity to have had to come for such a sad occasion. It is so nice in the country to-day."

Her sister sighed without answering, and Colombel mumbled, thinking perhaps of the walk ahead of him:

"My leg certainly is bothering me to-day."

Little Joseph and the dog were making a terrible noise; one was shrieking with pleasure, the other was barking wildly. They were playing hide-and-seek around the three flower beds, running after each other like mad.

The dying woman continued to call her children, talking with each one, imagining that she was dressing them, fondling them, teaching them how to read: "Come on! Simon repeat: A, B, C, D. You are not paying attention, listen—D, D, D; do you hear me? Now repeat——"

Cimme exclaimed: "Funny what people say when in that condition."

Mme. Colombel then asked:

"Wouldn't it be better if we were to return to her?"

But Cimme dissuaded her from the idea:

"What's the use? You can't change anything! We are just as comfortable here."

Nobody insisted. Mme. Cimme observed the two green birds called love-birds. In a few words she praised this singular faithfulness and blamed the men for not imitating these animals. Cimme began to laugh, looked at his wife and hummed in a teasing way: "Tra-la-la, tra-la-la" as though to cast a good deal of doubt on his own, Cimme's, faithfulness.

Colombel was suffering from cramps and was rapping the floor with his cane.

The other cat, its tail pointing upright to the sky, now came in.

They sat down to luncheon at one o'clock.

As soon as he had tasted the wine, Colombel, for whom only the best of Bordeaux had been prescribed, called the servant back:

"I say, my girl, is this the best stuff that you have in the cellar?"

"No, monsieur; there is some better wine, which was only brought out when you came."

"Well, bring us three bottles of it."

They tasted the wine and found it excellent, not because it was of a remarkable vintage, but because it had been in the cellar fifteen years. Cimme declared:

"That is regular invalid's wine."

Colombel, filled with an ardent desire to gain possession of this Bordeaux, once more questioned the girl:

"How much of it is left?"

"Oh! Almost all, monsieur; mamz'elle never touched it. It's in the bottom stack."

Then he turned to his brother-in-law:

"If you wish, Cimme, I would be willing to exchange something else for this wine; it suits my stomach marvellously."

The chicken had now appeared with its regiment of young ones. The two women were enjoying themselves throwing crumbs to them.

Joseph and the dog, who had eaten enough, were sent back to the garden.

Queen Hortense was still talking, but in a low, hushed voice, so that the words could no longer be distinguished.

When they had finished their coffee all went in to observe the condition of the sick woman. She seemed calm.

They went outside again and seated themselves in a circle in the garden, in order to complete their digestion.

Suddenly the dog, who was carrying something in his mouth, began to run around the chairs at full speed. The child was chasing him wildly. Both disappeared into the house.

Cimme fell asleep, his well-rounded paunch bathed in the glow of the shining sun.

The dying woman once more began to talk in a loud voice. Then suddenly she shrieked.

The two women and Colombel rushed in to see what was the matter. Cimme, waking up, did not budge, because he did not wish to witness such a scene.

She was sitting up, with haggard eyes. Her dog, in order to escape being pursued by little Joseph, had jumped up on the bed, run over the sick woman, and entrenched behind the pillow, was looking down at his playmate with snapping eyes, ready to jump down

and begin the game again. He was holding in his mouth one of his mistress' slippers, which he had torn to pieces and with which he had been playing for the last hour.

The child, frightened by this woman who had suddenly risen in front of him, stood motionless before the bed.

The hen had also come in, and frightened by the noise, had jumped up on a chair and was wildly calling her chicks, who were chirping distractedly around the four legs of the chair.

Queen Hortense was shrieking:

"No, no, I don't want to die, I don't want to! I don't want to! Who will bring up my children? Who will take care of them? Who will love them? No, I don't want to!—I don't——"

She fell back. All was over.

The dog, wild with excitement, jumped about the room, barking.

Colombel ran to the window, calling his brother-in-law:

"Hurry up, hurry up! I think that she has just gone."

Then Cimme, resigned, arose and entered the room, mumbling:

"It didn't take as long as I thought it would!"

# FASCINATION

I CAN tell you neither the name of the country, nor the name of the man. It was a long, long way from here on a fertile and burning shore. We had been walking since the morning along the coast, with the blue sea bathed in sunlight on one side of us, and the shore covered with crops on the other. Flowers were growing quite close to the waves, those light, gentle, lulling waves. It was very warm, a soft warmth permeated with the odor of the rich, damp, fertile soil. One fancied one was inhaling germs.

I had been told, that evening, that I should meet with hospitality at the house of a Frenchman who lived in an orange grove at the end of a promontory. Who was he? I did not know. He had come there one morning ten years before, and had bought land which he planted with vines and sowed with grain. He had worked, this man, with passionate energy, with fury. Then as he went on from month to month, year to year, enlarging his boundaries, cultivating incessantly the strong virgin soil, he accumulated a fortune by his indefatigable labor.

But he kept on working, they said. Rising at daybreak, he would remain in the fields till evening, superintending everything without ceasing, tormented by one fixed idea, the insatiable desire for

money, which nothing can quiet, nothing satisfy. He now appeared to be very rich.

The sun was setting as I reached his house. It was situated as described, at the end of a promontory in the midst of a grove of orange trees. It was a large square house, quite plain, and overlooked the sea.

As I approached, a man wearing a long beard appeared in the doorway. Having greeted him, I asked if he would give me shelter for the night. He held out his hand and said, smiling:

"Come in, monsieur, consider yourself at home."

He led me into a room, and put a man servant at my disposal with the perfect ease and familiar graciousness of a man-of-the-world. Then he left me saying:

"We will dine as soon as you are ready to come downstairs."

We took dinner, sitting opposite each other, on a terrace facing the sea. I began to talk about this rich, distant, unknown land. He smiled, as he replied carelessly:

"Yes, this country is beautiful. But no country satisfies one when they are far from the one they love."

"You regret France?"

"I regret Paris."

"Why do you not go back?"

"Oh, I will return there."

And gradually we began to talk of French society, of the boulevards, and things Parisian. He asked me questions that showed he knew all about these things, mentioned names, all the familiar names in vaudeville known on the sidewalks.

"Whom does one see at Tortoni's now?"

"Always the same crowd, except those who died."

I looked at him attentively, haunted by a vague recollection. I certainly had seen that head somewhere. But where? And when? He seemed tired, although he was vigorous; and sad, although he was determined. His long, fair beard fell on his chest. He was somewhat bald and had heavy eyebrows and a thick mustache.

The sun was sinking into the sea, turning the vapor from the earth into a fiery mist. The orange blossoms exhaled their powerful, delicious fragrance. He seemed to see nothing besides me, and gazing steadfastly he appeared to discover in the depths of my mind the far-away, beloved and well-known image of the wide, shady pavement leading from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot.

"Do you know Boutrelle?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Has he changed much?"

"Yes, his hair is quite white."

"And La Ridamie?"

"The same as ever."

"And the women? Tell me about the women. Let's see. Do you know Suzanne Verner?"

"Yes, very much. But that is over."

"Ah! And Sophie Astier?"

"Dead."

"Poor girl. Did you—did you know——"

But he ceased abruptly. And then, in a changed voice, his face suddenly turning pale, he continued:

"No, it is best that I should not speak of that any more, it breaks my heart."

Then, as if to change the current of his thoughts he rose.

"Would you like to go in?" he said.

"Yes, I think so."

And he preceded me into the house. The downstairs rooms were enormous, bare and mournful, and had a deserted look. Plates and glasses were scattered on the tables, left there by the dark-skinned servants who wandered incessantly about this spacious dwelling.

Two rifles were hanging from two nails on the wall; and in the corners of the rooms were spades, fishing poles, dried palm leaves, every imaginable thing set down at random when people came home in the evening and ready to hand when they went out at any time, or went to work.

My host smiled as he said:

"This is the dwelling, or rather the kennel, of an exile, but my own room is cleaner. Let us go there."

As I entered I thought I was in a second-hand store, it was so full of things of all descriptions, strange things of various kinds that one felt must be souvenirs. On the walls were two pretty paintings by well-known artists, draperies, weapons, swords and pistols, and exactly in the middle, on the principal panel, a square of white satin in a gold frame.

Somewhat surprised, I approached to look at it, and perceived a hairpin fastened in the centre of the glossy satin. My host placed his hand on my shoulder.

"That," said he, "is the only thing that I look at here, and the only thing that I have seen for ten

years. M. Prudhomme said: 'This sword is the most memorable day of my life.' I can say: 'This hairpin is all my life.'"

I sought for some commonplace remark, and ended by saying:

"You have suffered on account of some woman?"

He replied abruptly:

"Say, rather, that I am suffering like a wretch. . . . But come out on my balcony. A name rose to my lips just now which I dared not utter; for if you had said 'Dead' as you did of Sophie Astier, I should have fired a bullet into my brain, this very day."

We had gone out on the wide balcony from whence we could see two gulfs, one to the right and the other to the left, enclosed by high gray mountains. It was just twilight and the reflection of the sunset still lingered in the sky.

He continued:

"Is Jeanne de Limours still alive?"

His eyes were fastened on mine and were full of a trembling anxiety. I smiled.

"Parbleu—she is prettier than ever."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes."

He hesitated and then said:

"Very well?"

"No."

He took my hand.

"Tell me about her," he said.

"Why, I have nothing to tell. She is one of the most charming women, or, rather, girls, and the most admired in Paris. She leads a delightful existence and lives like a princess, that is all."

"I love her," he murmured in a tone in which he might have said "I am going to die." Then suddenly he continued:

"Ah! For three years we lived in a state of terror and delight. I almost killed her five or six times. She tried to pierce my eyes with that hairpin that you saw just now. Look, do you see that little white spot beneath my left eye? We loved each other. How can I explain that infatuation? You would not understand it."

"There must be a simple form of love, the result of the mutual impulse of two hearts and two souls. But there is also assuredly an atrocious form, that tortures one cruelly, the result of the occult blending of two unlike personalities who detest each other at the same time that they adore one another."

"In three years this woman had ruined me. I had four million francs which she squandered in her calm manner, quietly, eat them up with a gentle smile that seemed to fall from her eyes on to her lips."

"You know her? There is something irresistible about her. What is it? I do not know. Is it those gray eyes whose glance penetrates you like a gimlet and remains there like the point of an arrow? It is more likely the gentle, indifferent and fascinating smile that she wears like a mask. Her slow grace pervades you little by little; exhales from her like a perfume, from her slim figure that scarcely sways as she passes you, for she seems to glide rather than walk; from her pretty voice with its slight drawl that would seem to be the music of her smile; from her gestures, also, which are never exaggerated, but always appropriate, and intoxicate

your vision with their harmony. For three years she was the only being that existed for me on the earth! How I suffered; for she deceived me as she deceived everyone! Why? For no reason; just for the pleasure of deceiving. And when I found it out, when I treated her as a common girl and a beggar, she said quietly: 'Are we married?'

"Since I have been here I have thought so much about her that at last I understand her. She is Manon Lescaut come back to life. It is Manon, who could not love without deceiving; Manon for whom love, amusement, money, are all one."

He was silent. After a few minutes he resumed:

"When I had spent my last sou on her she said simply:

" 'You understand, my dear boy, that I cannot live on air and weather. I love you very much, better than anyone, but I must live. Poverty and I could not keep house together."

"And if I should tell you what a horrible life I led with her! When I looked at her I would just as soon have killed her as kissed her. When I looked at her . . . I felt a furious desire to open my arms to embrace and strangle her. She had, back of her eyes, something false and intangible that made me execrate her; and that was, perhaps, the reason I loved her so well. The eternal feminine, the odious and seductive feminine, was stronger in her than in any other woman. She was full of it, overcharged, as with a venomous and intoxicating fluid. She was a woman to a greater extent than any one has ever been."

"And when I went out with her she would look at all men in such a manner that she seemed to

offer herself to each in a single glance. This exasperated me, and still it attached me to her all the more. This creature in just walking along the street belonged to everyone, in spite of me, in spite of herself, by the very fact of her nature, although she had a modest, gentle carriage. Do you understand?

"And what torture! At the theatre, at the restaurant she seemed to belong to others under my very eyes. And as soon as I left her she did belong to others.

"It is now ten years since I saw her and I love her better than ever."

Night spread over the earth. A strong perfume of orange blossoms pervaded the air. I said:

"Will you see her again?"

"Parbleu! I now have here, in land and money, seven to eight thousand francs. When I reach a million I shall sell out and go away. I shall have enough to live on with her for a year—one whole year. And then, good-bye, my life will be finished."

"But after that?" I asked.

"After that, I do not know. That will be all. I may possibly ask her to take me as a valet de chambre."

# ALLOUMA

## I

"IF you happen to be near Bordj-Ebbaba while you are in Algeria, be sure and go to see my old friend Auballe, who has settled there," said one of my friends.

I had forgotten the name of Auballe and of Ebbaba, and was not thinking of the settler, when I arrived at his house by pure accident. For a month I had been wandering on foot through that magnificent district which extends from Algiers to Cherchell, Orléansville and Tiaret. It is at the same time wooded and bare, grand and charming. Between two hills one comes across large pine forests, in narrow valleys, through which torrents rush in the winter. Enormous trees, which have fallen across the ravine, serve as a bridge for the Arabs and also for the tropical creepers, which twine round the dead stems and adorn them with new life. There are hollows in little-known recesses of the mountains, of an awe-inspiring beauty, and level banks of streams, which are covered with oleanders and are indescribably lovely.

But the most pleasant recollections of that excursion are the long after-dinner walks along the slightly wooded roads, on those coast hills from which one can see an immense tract of country from

the blue sea as far as the chain of the Ouarsenis, on whose summit is the cedar forest of Teniet-el-Haad.

On that day I lost my way. I had just climbed to the top of a hill, whence, beyond a long extent of rising ground, I could see the extensive plain of Metidja, and then, on the summit of another chain, almost invisible in the distance, that strange monument which is called *The Tomb of the Christian Woman,* which is said to be the burial-place of a royal family of Mauritania. I went down again, going southward, with a yellow landscape before me, extending as far as the fringe of the desert, as yellow as if all those hills were covered with lions' skins sewn together. Sometimes a pointed yellow peak would rise out of the midst of them, like the hairy back of a camel.

I walked quickly and lightly, as one does when following tortuous paths on a mountain slope. Nothing seems to weigh on one in those short, quick walks through the invigorating air of those heights, neither the body, nor the heart, nor the thoughts, nor even cares. On that day I felt nothing of all that crushes and tortures our life; I only felt the pleasure of that descent. In the distance I saw an Arab encampment, brown pointed tents, which seemed rooted to the earth as limpets are to a rock, or else *gourbis,* huts made of branches, from which rose a gray smoke. White figures, men and women, were walking slowly about, and the bells of the flocks sounded indistinctly through the evening air.

The arbutus trees on the road hung down under the weight of their purple fruit, which was falling on the ground. They looked like martyred trees, from which bood-colored sweat was falling, for at

the tip of every stem there was a red berry, like a drop of blood.

The earth all round them was covered with a rain of this fruit and as my feet crushed them, they left blood-colored tracks behind them. Sometimes, as I went along, I would jump and pick some berries and eat them.

All the valleys were by this time filled with a white vapor, which rose slowly, like steam from the flanks of an ox; and on the chain of mountains that bordered the horizon, on the outskirts of the desert of Sahara, the sky was in flames. Long streaks of gold alternated with streaks of blood—blood again! Blood and gold, the whole of human history—and sometimes between the two there was a small opening in the greenish azure, far away like a dream.

How far away I was from all those persons and things with which one occupies oneself on the boulevards, far from myself also, for I had become a kind of wandering being, without thought or consciousness, far from my road, of which I was not even thinking, for as night came on, I found that I had lost my way.

The shades of night were falling on the earth like a shower of blackness, and I saw nothing before me but the mountain in the far distance. Presently I distinguished some tents in the valley into which I descended, and tried to make the first Arab I met understand in which direction I wanted to go. I do not know whether he understood me, but he gave me a long answer, which I did not in the least understand. In despair I was about to make up my mind to pass the night wrapped up in a rug near the en-

campment, when among the strange words that he uttered, I fancied that I heard the name *Bordj-Ebbaba,* and so I repeated:

*"Bordj-Ebbaba."*

"Yes, yes."

I showed him two francs that were a fortune to him and he started off while I followed him. Ah! I followed that pale phantom which strode on before me barefooted, along stony paths on which I stumbled continually, for a long time, and then suddenly I saw a light, and we presently reached the door of a white house, a kind of fortress with plain walls without any outside windows. When I knocked, dogs began to bark inside, and a voice asked in French:

"Who is there?"

"Does Monsieur Auballe live here?" I asked.

"Yes."

The door was opened for me, and I found myself face to face with Monsieur Auballe himself, a tall man in slippers, with a pipe in his mouth and the appearance of a jolly Hercules.

As soon as I mentioned my name, he put out both his hands and said:

"Consider yourself at home here, monsieur."

A quarter of an hour later I was dining ravenously opposite to my host, who went on smoking.

I knew his history. After having wasted a great amount of money on women, he had invested the remnants of his fortune in Algerian landed property and taken to money-making. It turned out prosperously; he was happy and had the calm look of a happy and contented man. I could not understand how this fast Parisian could have grown accustomed

to that horrible life in such a lonely spot, and I asked him about it.

"How long have you been here?" I asked him.

"For nine years."

"And have you not been intolerably dull and miserable?"

"No, one gets used to this country, and ends by liking it. You cannot imagine what a hold it has on people through those small animal instincts that we are unaware of ourselves. We first become attached to it through our external senses, to which it affords secret gratifications which we do not inquire into. The air and the climate overcome our flesh, in spite of ourselves, and the bright light with which it is inundated keeps the mind clear and fresh at but little cost. It penetrates our being continually through our eyes, and one might really say that it purifies the sombre nooks of the soul."

"But what about women?"

"Ah! There is rather a dearth of them!"

"Only *rather?*"

"Well, yes—rather. For one can always, even among the Arabs, find some complaisant native women, who think of the nights of Roumi."

He turned to the Arab, who was waiting on me, a tall, dark fellow, with bright black eyes, that flashed beneath his turban, and said to him:

"I will call you when I want you, Mohammed." And then turning to me, he said:

"He understands French, and I am going to tell you a story in which he plays a leading part."

As soon as the man had left the room, he began:

"I had been here about four years, and hardly

felt quite settled yet in this country, whose language I was beginning to speak.

"I had bought this farm, this *bordj,* which had been a military post, and was within a few hundred yards from the native encampment, the men of which I employ to cultivate my land. From among the tribe that had settled here, and which formed a portion of the Oulad-Taadja, I chose, as soon as I arrived here, that tall fellow whom you have just seen, Mohammed ben Lam'har, who soon became greatly attached to me. As he would not sleep in a house, not being accustomed to it, he pitched his tent a few yards from my house, so that I might be able to call him from my window.

"You can guess what my life was, I dare say. Every day I was busy with clearing and planting. I hunted a little. I used to go and dine with the officers of the neighboring fortified post or else they came and dined with me. As for pleasures, I have told you what they consisted in. Algiers offered me some which were rather more refined, and from time to time a complaisant and compassionate Arab would stop me when I was out for a walk and offer to bring one of the women of his tribe to my house at night. Sometimes I accepted, but more frequently I refused, for fear of the disagreeable consequences and the trouble it might entail upon me.

"One evening at the beginning of summer I was going home, after going over the farm, and as I wanted Mohammed, I went into his tent without calling him, as I frequently did, and there I saw a woman, a girl, sleeping almost nude, with her arms crossed under her head, on one of those thick red carpets, made of the fine wool of Djebel-Amour, and

which are as soft and as thick as a feather bed. Her body, which was beautifully white under the ray of light that came in through the raised covering of the tent, appeared to me to be one of the most perfect specimens of the human race that I had ever seen, and most of the women about here are beautiful and tall, and are a rare combination of features and form. I let the flap of the tent fall in some confusion and returned home.

"The sudden flash of this vision had penetrated and scorched me and caused the blood to run through my veins with all the old ardor. It was a very hot July evening, and I spent nearly the whole night at my window, with my eyes fixed on the black Mohammed's tent.

"When he came into my room the next morning, I looked him closely in the face, and he hung his head like a man who was guilty and confused. Did he guess that I knew? I asked him suddenly:

"'So you are married, Mohammed?' and I saw that he got red and he stammered out: 'No, *moussié!*'

"I used to make him speak French to me and give me Arabic lessons, which was often productive of a most incoherent mixture of languages. However, I went on:

"'Then why is there a woman in your tent?'

"'She comes from the South,' he said in a low, apologetic voice.

"'Oh! So she comes from the South? But that does not explain to me how she comes to be in your tent.'

"Without answering my question, he continued:

"'She is very pretty.'

"'Oh! Indeed. Another time, please, when you happen to receive a pretty woman from the South, you will take care that she comes to my *gourbi,* and not to yours. You understand me, Mohammed?'

"'Yes, *moussié,*' he repeated, seriously.

"I must acknowledge that during the whole day I was in a state of aggressive excitement at the recollection of that Arab girl lying on the red carpet, and when I went in at dinner time, I felt very strongly inclined to go to Mohammed's tent again. During the evening he waited on me just as usual and hovered round me with his impassive face, and several times I came very near asking him whether he intended to keep that girl from the South, who was very pretty, in his camel skin tent for any length of time.

"Toward nine o'clock, still troubled with that longing for female society which is as tenacious as the hunting instinct in dogs, I went out to get some fresh air and to stroll about a little round that cone of brown canvas through which I could see a brilliant speck of light. I did not remain long, however, for fear of being surprised by Mohammed in the neighborhood of his dwelling. When I went in an hour later, I clearly saw his outline in the tent, and then, taking the key out of my pocket, I went into the *bordj,* where besides myself, there slept my steward, two French laborers and an old cook whom I had picked up in Algiers. As I went upstairs I was surprised to see a streak of light under my door, and when I opened it, I saw a girl with the face of a statue sitting on a straw chair by the side of the table, on which a wax candle was burning; she was bedizened with all those silver ornaments which

women in the South wear on their legs, arms, breast, and even on their abdomen. Her eyes, which were tinged with kohl, to make them look larger, regarded me earnestly, and four little blue spots, finely tattooed on her skin, marked her forehead, her cheeks and her chin. Her arms, which were loaded with bracelets, were resting on her thighs, which were covered by the long red silk *gebba*, or covering, that fell from her shoulders.

"When she saw me come in, she rose and remained standing in front of me, covered with her barbaric jewels, in an attitude of proud submission.

"'What are you doing here?' I said to her in Arabic.

"'I am here because Mohammed told me to come.'

"'Very well; sit down.'

"So she sat down and lowered her eyes while I examined her attentively.

"She had a strange, regular, delicate and rather animal face, but mysterious as that of a Buddha. Her lips, which were rather thick and with a sort of red bloom, which I discovered on other portions of her body as well, indicated a slight admixture of negro blood, although her hands and arms were of an irreproachable whiteness.

"I hesitated as to what to do with her, and felt excited, tempted and rather embarrassed; so, in order to gain time and to give myself an opportunity for reflection, I put other questions to her: about her birth, how she came into this part of the country, and what her connection with Mohammed was. But she only replied to those that interested me the least, and it was impossible for me to find out why she had come, with what intention, by whose orders,

nor what had taken place between her and my servant. However, just as I was about to say to her, 'Go back to Mohammed's tent,' she seemed to guess my intention, for getting up suddenly, and raising her two bare arms, on which the jingling bracelets slipped down to her shoulders, she clasped her hands behind my neck and drew me toward her with an irresistible air of suppliant longing.

"Her eyes, which were bright from emotion, from that necessity of conquering man, which imparts to the looks of an impure woman the same fascination as that exercised by the eyes of the feline tribe, allured me, enchanted me, deprived me of all power of resistance and filled me with impetuous ardor. It was a short, sharp struggle of the eyes only, that eternal struggle between those two human brutes, the male and the female, in which the male is always vanquished.

"Her hands, which were clasped behind my head, drew me irresistibly, with a gentle, increasing pressure, as if by mechanical force, toward her red lips, on which I suddenly pressed mine, while at the same moment I clasped her body that was covered with jingling silver rings in an ardent embrace.

"She was as nervous, supple, healthy as a wild animal, with all the motions, the ways, the grace and even something of the odor of a gazelle, which made me find a rare, unknown zest in her kisses, which was as strange to my senses as the taste of tropical fruit.

"Presently—I say presently, although it may have been toward morning—I wished to send her away, as I thought that she would go in the same way that she had come. I did not even at the moment ask

myself what I should do with her, or what she would do with me, but as soon as she guessed my intention, she whispered:

"'If you put me out, where shall I go now? I shall have to sleep on the ground in the open air at night. Let me sleep on the carpet at the foot of your bed.'

"What answer could I give her, or what could I do? I thought that no doubt Mohammed also would be watching the window of my room, in which a light was burning, and questions of various natures, that I had not put to myself during the first minutes, formulated themselves clearly in my brain.

"'Stay here,' I replied, 'and we will talk.'

"My resolution was taken in a moment. As this girl had been thrown into my arms in this manner I would keep her; I would make her a kind of slave-wife, hidden in my house, as women are in a harem. When the time should come that I no longer cared for her, it would be easy for me to get rid of her in some way or other, for on African soil that sort of creature almost belongs to us, body and soul; and so I said to her:

"'I wish to be kind to you, and I will treat you so that you shall not be unhappy, but I want to know who you are and where you come from.'

"She saw clearly that she must say something, and she told me her story, or rather a story, for no doubt she was lying, from beginning to end, as all Arabs always do, with or without any motive.

"That is one of the most surprising and incomprehensible signs of the native character—the Arabs always lie. Those people in whom Islam has become so incarnate that it has become part of them-

selves, to such an extent as to model their instincts and modify the entire race, and to differentiate it from others in morals just as much as the color of the skin distinguishes a negro from a white man, are liars to the backbone, so that one can never trust a word that they say. I do not know whether they owe that to their religion, but one must have lived among them in order to know the extent to which lying forms part of their being, of their heart and soul, until it has become a kind of second nature, a very necessity of life, with them.

"Well, she told me that she was the daughter of a *Caidi* of the *Ouled Sidi Cheik* and of a woman whom he had carried off in a raid against the Touaregs. The woman must have been a black slave, or, at any rate, have sprung from a first cross of Arab and negro blood. Nothing of such an origin was to be noticed, however, except the crimson color of her lips and the dark nipples of her elongated breasts. Nobody who knew anything about the matter could be mistaken in that. But all the rest of her belonged to the beautiful race from the South, white-skinned, supple, with a delicate face which was formed on straight and simple lines like those of a Hindu image. Her eyes, which were very far apart, still farther heightened the somewhat god-like looks of this desert marauder.

"I knew nothing exact about her real life. She related it to me in incoherent fragments, that seemed to rise up at random from a disordered memory, and she mixed up deliciously childish observations with them; a whole vision of a nomad world, born of a squirrel's brain that had leaped from tent to tent, from encampment to encampment, from tribe to

tribe. And all this was told with the serious look that this reserved people always maintain, with the appearance and rather comic gravity of a brass idol.

"When she had finished, I perceived that I had not remembered anything of that long story, full of insignificant events, that she had stored up in her flighty brain, and I asked myself whether she had not simply been making fun of me by her empty and would-be serious chatter, which told me nothing about herself nor about any real facts connected with her life.

"And I thought of that conquered race, amid whom we have encamped, or, rather, who are encamping in our midst; whose language we are beginning to speak; whom we see every day, living under the transparent canvas of their tents, on whom we have imposed our laws, our regulations, and our customs; and about whom we know nothing, nothing I assure you, any more than if we were not here, and had not been occupied solely in looking at them, for nearly sixty years. We know no more about what is going on in those huts made of branches, and under those small canvas cones fastened to the ground by stakes, which are within twenty yards of our doors, than we know what the so-called civilized Arabs of the Moorish houses in Algiers do, think and are. Behind the whitewashed walls of their town houses, behind the partition of their *gourbi,* which is made of branches, or behind that thin, brown curtain of camel's hair, which the wind moves, they live close to us, unknown, mysterious, liars, cunning, submissive, smiling, impenetrable. What if I were to tell you, that when I look at the neighboring encampment through my field-glasses,

I can guess at superstitions, customs, ceremonies, a thousand practices of which we know nothing, and which we do not even suspect! Never previously, in all probability, did a conquered race know so well how to escape so completely from the real domination, the moral influence and the unceasing, but useless, investigations of its conquerors.

"Now, I suddenly felt the insurmountable secret barrier which incomprehensible nature had set up between the two races more than I had ever felt it before, between this Arab girl and myslf, between this woman who had just given herself to me, who had yielded herself to my caresses; and, thinking of it for the first time, I said to her: 'What is your name?'

"She did not speak for some moments, and I saw her start, as if she had forgotten that I was there, and then, in her eyes that were raised to mine, I saw that that moment had sufficed for her to be overcome by sleep, irresistible, sudden, almost overwhelming, like everything that lays hold of the mobile senses of women, and she answered, carelessly, suppressing a yawn:

"'Allouma.'

"'Are you sleepy?'

"'Yes,' she replied.

"'Very well then, go to sleep!'

"She stretched herself out tranquilly by my side, lying on her stomach, with her forehead resting on her folded arms, and I felt almost immediately that her fleeting, untutored thoughts were lulled in repose, while I began to ponder, and tried to understand it all. Why had Mohammed given her to me? Had he acted the part of a magnanimous servant,

who sacrifices himself for his master, even to the extent of giving up to him the woman whom he had brought into his own tent? Or had he, on the other hand, obeyed a more complex and more practical, though less generous impulse, in handing over to me this girl who had taken my fancy? An Arab, when it is a question of women, is rigorously modest and unspeakably complaisant, and one can no more understand his rigorous and easy morality than one can all the rest of his sentiments. Perhaps, when I accidentally went into his tent, I had merely forestalled the benevolent intentions of this thoughtful servant, who had intended this woman, his friend and accomplice, or perhaps even his sweetheart, for me.

"All these suppositions assailed me, and fatigued me so much, that, at last, in my turn, I fell into a profound sleep, from which I was roused by the creaking of my door, and Mohammed came in to call me as usual. He opened the window, through which a flood of light streamed in, and fell over Allouma, who was still asleep; then he picked up my trousers, coat and waistcoat from the floor, in order to brush them. He did not look at the woman who was lying by my side, did not seem to know or to remark that she was there, and preserved his ordinary gravity, demeanor and looks. But the light, the movement, the slight noise which his bare feet made, the feeling of the fresh air on her skin and in her lungs, roused Allouma from her lethargy. She stretched out her arms, turned over, opened her eyes, and looked at me and then at Mohammed with the same indifference; then she sat up in bed and said: 'I am hungry.'

"'What would you like?'

"'Kahoua.'

"'Coffee and bread and butter?'

"'Yes.'

"Mohammed remained standing close to the couch, with my clothes under his arm, waiting for my orders.

"'Bring breakfast for Allouma and me,' I said to him.

"He went out, without his face betraying the slightest astonishment or anger, and as soon as he had left the room, I said to the girl:

"'Will you live in my house?'

"'I should like to, very much.'

"'I will give you a room to yourself, and a woman to wait on you.'

"'You are very generous, and I am grateful to you.'

"'But if you behave badly, I shall send you away immediately.'

"'I will do everything that you wish me to.'

"She took my hand and kissed it as a token of submission, and just then Mohammed came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast on it, and I said to him:

"'Allouma is going to live here. You must spread a carpet on the floor of the room at the end of the passage, and get Abd-El-Kader-El-Hadara's wife to come and wait on her.'

"'Yes, *moussié*.'

"That was all.

"An hour later my beautiful Arab was installed in a large airy, light room, and when I went in to make sure that everything was well, she asked me in a beseeching tone of voice to make her a present of a

wardrobe with a mirror. I promised it to her; then I left her crouching on the carpet of *Djebel-Amour*, a cigarette in her mouth, and chatting away with the old Arabian woman for whom I had sent, as though they had known each other for years.

## II

"For a month I was very happy with her and I became strangely attached to this creature of another race, who seemed to me to be almost an entirely different being, born on a neighboring planet.

"I cannot say that I loved her—no—one does not love the girls of this primitive continent. Between them and us, even between them and their natural males, the Arabs, the little blue flower of northern climes never blooms. They are too much like human animals, their hearts are too rudimentary, their feelings are not refined enough to awaken in us that sentimental exaltation which is the poetry of love. Nothing intellectual, no intoxication of thought or feeling is mingled with that intoxication of the senses which those charming, vacant beings excite in us. Nevertheless they capitivate us as others do, but in a different fashion, which is less tenacious, and, at the same time, less cruel and painful.

"I cannot even now explain precisely what I felt for her. I said to you just now that this country, this Africa, devoid of art, devoid of all intellectual pleasures, gradually captivates us through its climate, through the continual mildness of the dawn and sunset, its delightful light, and the feeling of well-being with which it fills all our senses. Well,

then! 'Allouma captivated me in the same manner by a thousand hidden, physical, alluring charms.

"I left her absolutely free to come and go as she liked, and she certainy spent one afternoon out of two with the wives of my native agricultural laborers. Often also she would remain for nearly a whole day admiring herself in front of a mahogany wardrobe with a large mirror in the door that I had sent for from Miliana.

"She admired herself conscientiously, standing befor the glass door in which she followed her own movements with profound and serious attention. She walked with her head somewhat thrown back, in order to be able to see whether her hips and back swayed properly; went away, came back again, and then, tired with her own movements, she sat down on a cushion opposite her own reflection, and remained with her eyes gazing seriously into the eyes in the mirror, her whole soul absorbed in that picture.

"Soon I began to notice that she went out nearly every morning after breakfast, and that she disappeared altogether until evening, and as I felt rather anxious about this, I asked Mohammed whether he knew what she could be doing during all those long hours of absence, but he replied very calmly:

"'Do not be uneasy. It will be the Feast of Ramadan soon and she goes to say her prayers.'

"He also seemed delighted at having Allouma in the house, but I never once saw anything between them to arouse suspicion, and so I accepted the situation as it was, and let time, accident and life act for themselves.

"Often, after I had inspected my farm, my vine-

yards and my clearings, I would take long walks. You know the magnificent forests in this part of Algeria, those almost impenetrable ravines, where fallen pine trees stem the mountain torrents, and those little valleys filled with oleanders, which look like oriental carpets stretching along the banks of the streams. You know that at every moment, in these woods and on these hills, which one would think that no one had ever penetrated, one suddenly sees the white dome of a shrine that contains the bones of a humble, solitary marabout, which is rarely visited, from time to time, by a few confirmed believers, who come from the neighboring villages with a wax candle in their pocket, to set up before the tomb of the saint.

"Now, one evening as I was going home, I was passing one of these Mohammedan shrines, and looking in through the door, which was always open, I saw a woman praying before the altar—an Arab woman, sitting on the ground in that dilapidated building, into which the wind entered as it pleased and heaped up the fine, dry pine needles in yellow heaps in the corners. I went near to see better, and recognized Allouma. She neither saw nor heard me, so absorbed was she with the saint, to whom she was speaking in a low voice, as though she thought that she was alone with him, and was telling this servant of God all her troubles. Sometimes she stopped for a short time to think, to try and recollect what more she had to say, so that she might not forget anything that she wished to confide to him; then again she would grow animated, as if he had replied to her, as if he had advised her to do something that she did not want to do, and the reasons for which she was im-

pugning, and I went away as I had come, without making any noise, and returned home to dinner.

"That evening, when I sent for her, I saw that she had a thoughtful look, which was not usual with her.

"'Sit down there,' I said, pointing to her place on the couch by my side. As soon as she had sat down, I stooped to kiss her, but she drew her head away quickly, and, in great astonishment, I said to her:

"'Well, what is the matter?'

"'It is the Ramadan,' she said.

"'I began to laugh and said: 'And the Marabout has forbidden you to allow yourself to be kissed during the Ramadan?'

"'Oh, yes; I am an Arab woman, and you are a Roumi!'

"'And it would be a great sin?'

"'Oh, yes!'

"'So you ate nothing all day, until sunset?'

"'No, nothing.'

"'But you had something to eat after sundown?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, then, as it is quite dark now, you ought not to be more strict about the rest than you are about your mouth.'

"She seemed irritated, wounded, and offended, and replied with an amount of pride that I had never noticed in her before:

"'If an Arab girl were to allow herself to be touched by a Roumi during the Ramadan, she would be cursed forever.'

"'And that is to continue for a whole month?'

"'Yes, for the whole of the month of Ramadan,' she replied, with great determination.

"I assumed an irritated manner and said: 'Very well, then, you can go and spend the Ramadan with your family.'

"She seized my hands, and laying them on my heart, she said:

"'Oh, please do not be unkind, and you shall see how good I will be. We will keep Ramadan together, if you like. I will look after you and humor you, but don't be unkind.'

"I could not help smiling at her strange manner and her anxiety, and I sent her to sleep at home; but, an hour later, just as I was thinking about going to bed, there came two little taps at my door, which were so slight, however, that I scarcely heard them; but when I said, 'Come in,' Allouma appeared, carrying a large tray covered with Arab dainties, rice croquettes sauté and covered with sugar, and a variety of other strange Arab delicacies.

"She laughed, showing her white teeth, and said: 'Come, we will keep Ramadan together.'

"You know that the fast, which begins at dawn and ends at twilight, at the moment when the eye can no longer distinguish a black from a white thread, is followed every evening by small friendly entertainments, at which eating is kept up until the morning, and the result is that for such of the natives as are not very scrupulous, Ramadan consists of turning day into night and night into day. But Allouma carried her delicacy of conscience further than this. She placed her tray between us on the divan, and taking a small sugared ball between

her long, slender fingers, she put it into my mouth and whispered: 'Eat it, it is very good.'

"I munched the light cake, which was really excellent, and asked her: 'Did you make that?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'For me?'

" 'Yes, for you.'

" 'To enable me to support Ramadan?'

" 'Oh, don't be so unkind! I will bring you some every day.'

"Oh! the terrible month that I spent! A sugared, insipidly sweet month, a month that nearly drove me mad; a month of petting and of temptation, of anger and of vain efforts to resist temptation, but at last the three days of Beiram came, which I celebrated in my own fashion, and Ramadan was forgotten.

"The summer went on, and it was very hot, and in the first days of autumn Allouma appeared to me to be preoccupied and absent-minded and apparently taking no interest in anything; and, at last, when I sent for her one evening, she was not to be found in her room. I thought that she was roaming about the house, and gave orders to look for her. She had not come in, however, and so I opened my window and called Mohammed.

"The voice of the man, who was lying in his tent, replied:

" 'Yes, *moussié*.'

" 'Do you know where Allouma is?'

" 'No, *moussié*. It is not possible—— Is Allouma lost?'

"A few moments later my Arab came into my room, so agitated that he could not master his feelings, and said:

"'Is Allouma lost?'

"'Yes, she is lost.'

"'It is impossible.'

"'Go and look for her,' I said.

"He remained standing where he was, thinking, seeking for her motives, and unable to understand anything about it. Then he went into the empty room, where Allouma's clothes were lying about, in oriental disorder. He examined everything, as if he had been a police officer, or, rather, he sniffed about like a dog, and then, incapable of any lengthened effort, he murmured resignedly:

"'She has gone, she has gone!'

"I was afraid that some accident had happened to her; that she had fallen into some ravine and sprained her ankle, and I immediately sent out all the men about the place with orders to look for her until they should find her, and they hunted for her all that night, the next day and all the week long, but nothing was discovered that could put us on her track. I suffered, for I missed her very much; my house seemed empty and my existence a void. And then horrible thoughts entered my mind. I feared that she might have been carried off or even murdered; but when I spoke about it to Mohammed, and tried to make him share my fears, he invariably replied:

"'No; gone away.'

"Then he added the Arab word *r'ézale,* which means *gazelle,* as if he meant to say that she could run quickly and that she was far away.

"Three weeks passed, and I had given up all hopes of seeing my Arab mistress again, when one morning

Mohammed came into my room, with every sign of joy in his face, and said to me:

"'*Moussié,* Allouma has come back.'

"I jumped out of bed and said:

"'Where is she?'

"'She does not dare to come in! There she is, under the tree.'

"And stretching out his arm, he pointed out to me, through the window, a whitish spot at the foot of an olive tree.

"I got up immediately and went out to where she was. As I approached what looked like a mere bundle of linen thrown against the gnarled trunk of the tree, I recognized the large, dark eyes, the tattooed stars and the long, regular features of that semi-wild girl who had so captivated my senses. As I advanced toward her, I felt inclined to strike her, to make her suffer pain, and to have my revenge, and so I called out to her from a little distance:

"'Where have you been?'

"She did not reply, but remained motionless and inert, as if she were scarcely alive, resigned to any violence, and ready to receive my blows. I was standing up, close to her, looking in stupefaction at the rags with which she was covered, at those bits of silk and wool, covered with dust, torn and dirty, and, raising my hand, as if she had been a dog, I repeated:

"'Where have you come from?'

"'From yonder,' she said in a whisper.

"'Where is that?'

"'From the tribe.'

"'What tribe?'

"'Mine.'

"'Why did you go away?'

"When she saw that I was not going to beat her, she grew rather bolder and said in a low voice:

"'I was obliged to do it—I was forced to go; I could not stop in the house any longer.'

"I saw tears in her eyes, and immediately felt softened. I leaned over her, and when I turned round to sit down, I noticed Mohammed, who was watching us at a distance, and I went on very gently:

"'Come, tell me why you ran away.'

"Then she told me that for a long time in her nomad heart she had felt the irresistible desire to return to the tents, to lie, to run, to roll on the sand; to wander about the plains with the flocks, to feel nothing over her head, between the yellow stars in the sky and the blue stars in her face, except the thin, threadbare, patched canvas, through which she could see the sparks of fire in the sky when she awoke during the night.

"She made me understand all that in such simple and forcible language that I felt quite sure that she was not lying, and I pitied her and asked her:

"'Why did you not tell me that you wished to go away for a time?'

"'Because you would not have allowed me.'

"'If you had promised to come back, I should have consented.'

"'You would not have believed me.'

"Seeing that I was not angry, she began to laugh and said:

"'You see that is all over; I have come home again, and here I am. I only wanted a few days there. I have had enough of it now, it is finished and passed; the feeling is cured. I have come back and

have not that longing any more. I am very glad and you are very kind.'

"'Come into the house,' I said to her.

"She got up, and I took her hand, her delicate hand, with its slender fingers; and, triumphant in her rags, with her bracelets and her necklace jingling, she went gravely toward my house, where Mohammed was waiting for us. But, before going in, I said:

"'Allouma, whenever you want to return to your own people, tell me, and I will allow you to go.'

"'You promise?'

"'Yes, I promise.'

"'And I will make you a promise also. When I feel ill or unhappy'—and here she put her hand to her forehead with a magnificent gesture—'I shall say to you: "I must go yonder," and you will let me go.'

"I went with her to her room, followed by Mohammed, who was carrying some water, for there had been no time to tell the wife of Abd-el-Kader-el-Hadara that her mistress had returned. As soon as she got into her room and saw the wardrobe with the looking-glass in the door, she ran up to it, as a child does when it sees its mother. She looked at herself for a few seconds, pouted and then in a rather cross voice she said to the looking-glass:

"'Just you wait a moment; I have some silk dresses in the wardrobe. I shall be beautiful in a few minutes.'

"And I left her alone, to act the coquette to herself.

"Our life began its usual course again, as formerly, and I felt more and more under the influence

of the strange, merely physical attraction of that girl, for whom, at the same time, I felt a kind of paternal contempt. For two months all went well, and then I felt that she was again becoming nervous, agitated and rather low-spirited, and one day I said to her:

"'Do you want to return home again?'

"'Yes.'

"'And you did not dare to tell me?'

"'I did not venture to.'

"'Go, if you wish to; I give you leave.'

"She seized my hands and kissed them, as she did in all her outbursts of gratitude, and the same morning she disappeared.

"She came back, as she had done the first time, at the end of about three weeks, in rags, covered with dust, and satiated with her nomad life of sand and liberty. In two years she returned to her own people four times in this fashion.

"I took her back gladly, without any feeling of jealousy, for with me jealousy can only spring from love, as we Europeans understand it. I might very likely have killed her if I had surprised her in the act of deceiving me, but I should have done it just as one half kills a disobedient dog, from sheer violence. I should not have felt those torments, that consuming fire—Northern jealousy. I have just said that I should have killed her as I would a disobedient dog, and, as a matter of fact, I loved her somewhat in the same manner as one loves some very highly bred horse or dog, which it is impossible to replace. She was a splendid animal, a sensual animal, an animal made for pleasure, in the form of a woman.

"I cannot tell you what an immeasurable distance separated our two souls, although our hearts perhaps occasionally warmed toward each other. She was something belonging to my house, she was part of my life, she had become necessary to me, to the carnal man in me which was only eyes and senses.

"Well, one morning, Mohammed came into my room with a strange look on his face, that uneasy look of the Arabs, which resembles the furtive look of a cat, face to face with a dog, and when I noticed his expression, I said:

"'What is the matter now?'

"'Allouma has gone away.'

"I began to laugh and said: 'Where has she gone to?'

"'Gone away altogether, *moussié*.'

"'What do you mean by *gone away altogether?* You are mad, my man.'

"'No, *moussié*.'

"'Why has she gone away? Just explain yourself; come!'

"He remained motionless, and evidently did not wish to speak, and then he had one of those explosions of Arab rage, which make us stop in the street in front of two demoniacs, whose oriental silence and gravity suddenly give place to the most violent gesticulations, and the most ferocious vociferations, and I gathered amid his shouts that Allouma had run away with my shepherd, and when I had partially succeeded in calming him, I managed to extract the facts from him one by one.

"It was a long story, but at last I gathered that Mohammed had been watching Allouma, who used to meet a sort of vagabond whom my steward had

hired the month before, behind the neighboring cactus woods, or in the ravine where the oleanders bloomed. The night before Mohammed had seen her go out without seeing her return, and he repeated, in an exasperated manner: 'Gone, *moussié;* she has gone away!'

"I do not know why, but his conviction, the conviction that she had run away with this vagabond, laid hold of me irresistibly in a moment. It was absurd, unlikely, and yet certain, in virtue of that very unreasonableness which constitutes the only logic of women.

"Boiling over with indignation, I tried to recall the man's features, and I suddenly remembered having seen him the previous week, standing on a mound amid his flock and watching me. He was a tall Bedouin, the color of whose bare limbs blended with that of his rags; he was the type of a barbarous brute, with high cheek bones and hooked nose, a retreating chin, thin legs and a tall carcass in rags, with the shifty eyes of a jackal.

"I did not doubt for a moment that she had run away with that beggar. Why? Because she was Allouma, a daughter of the desert. A Parisian girl of a certain class would have run away with my coachman or some thief in the suburbs.

"'Very well,' I said to Mohammed. Then I got up, opened my window and began to draw in the stifling south wind, for the sirocco was blowing, and I thought to myself:

"Good heavens! she is—a woman, like so many others. Does anybody know what makes them act, what makes them love, what makes them follow, or throw over, a man? One certainly does know oc-

casionlly, but often one does not, and sometimes one is in doubt. Why did she run away with that repulsive brute? Why? Perhaps because the wind had been blowing from the South for a month; that was enough, a breath of wind! Does she know, do they know, even the cleverest of them, why they act? No more than a weather-cock that turns with the wind. An imperceptible breeze makes the iron, brass, zinc or wooden arrow revolve, just in the same manner as some imperceptible influence, some undiscernable impression moves the female heart, and urges it on to action; and it does not matter whether they belong to town or country, the suburbs or the desert.

"They can feel later on, provided that they can reason and understand, why they have done one thing rather than another; but, for the moment, they do not know, for they are the playthings of their own amazing sensibility, the thoughtless, giddy-headed slaves of circumstances, of their surroundings, of chance meetings, and of all the sensations with which their souls and their bodies vibrate."

Monsieur Auballe had risen, and, after walking up and down the room once or twice, he looked at me and said with a smile:

"That is love in the desert!"

"Suppose she were to come back?" I asked him.

"Wretched girl!" he replied. "But I should be very glad if she did return to me."

"And you would pardon the shepherd?"

"Good heavens, yes! With women one must always pardon—or else pretend not to see things."

# MADEMOISELLE PEARL

## I

WHAT a strange idea it was for me to choose Mademoiselle Pearl for queen that evening!

Every year I celebrate Twelfth Night with my old friend Chantal. My father, who was his most intimate friend, used to take me round there when I was a child. I continued the custom, and I doubtless shall continue it as long as I live and as long as there is a Chantal in this world.

The Chantals lead a peculiar existence; they live in Paris as though they were in Grasse, Yvetot, or Pont-à-Mousson.

They have a house with a little garden near the observatory. They live there as though they were in the country. Of Paris, the real Paris, they know nothing at all, they suspect nothing; they are so far, so far away! However, from time to time, they take a trip into it. Mademoiselle Chantal goes to lay in her provisions, as it is called in the family. This is how they go to purchase their provisions:

Mademoiselle Pearl, who has the keys to the kitchen closet (for the linen closets are administered by the mistress herself), Mademoiselle Pearl gives warning that the supply of sugar is low, that the preserves are giving out, that there is not much

left in the bottom of the coffee bag. Thus warned against famine, Mademoiselle Chantal passes everything in review, taking notes on a pad. Then she puts down a lot of figures and goes through lengthy calculations and long discussions with Mademoiselle Pearl. At last they manage to agree, and they decide upon the quantity of each thing of which they will lay in a three months' provision; sugar, rice, prunes, coffee, preserves, cans of peas, beans, lobster, salt or smoked fish, etc., etc. After which the day for the purchasing is determined on and they go in a cab with a railing round the top and drive to a large grocery store on the other side of the river in the new sections of the town.

Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Pearl make this trip together, mysteriously, and only return at dinner time, tired out, although still excited, and shaken up by the cab, the roof of which is covered with bundles and bags, like an express wagon.

For the Chantals all that part of Paris situated on the other side of the Seine constitutes the new quarter, a section inhabited by a strange, noisy population, which cares little for honor, spends its days in dissipation, its nights in revelry, and which throws money out of the windows. From time to time, however, the young girls are taken to the Opéra-Comique or the Théâtre Français, when the play is recommended by the paper which is read by M. Chantal.

At present the young ladies are respectively nineteen and seventeen. They are two pretty girls, tall and fresh, very well brought up, in fact, too well brought up, so much so that they pass by unperceived like two pretty dolls. Never would the

idea come to me to pay the slightest attention or to pay court to one of the young Chantal ladies; they are so immaculate that one hardly dares speak to them; one almost feels indecent when bowing to them.

As for the father, he is a charming man, well educated, frank, cordial, but he likes calm and quiet above all else, and has thus contributed greatly to the mummifying of his family in order to live as he pleased in stagnant quiescence. He reads a lot, loves to talk and is readily affected. Lack of contact and of elbowing with the world has made his moral skin very tender and sensitive. The slightest thing moves him, excites him, and makes him suffer.

The Chantals have limited connections carefully chosen in the neighborhood. They also exchange two or three yearly visits with relatives who live in the distance.

As for me, I take dinner with them on the fifteenth of August and on Twelfth Night. That is as much one of my duties as Easter communion is for a Catholic.

On the fifteenth of August a few friends are invited, but on Twelfth Night I am the only stranger.

Well, this year, as every former year, I went to the Chantals' for my Epiphany dinner.

According to my usual custom, I kissed M. Chantal, Madame Chantal and Mademoiselle Pearl, and I made a deep bow to the Misses Louise and Pauline. I was questioned about a thousand and one things, about what had happened on the boulevards, about politics, about how matters stood in Tong-King, and about our representatives in Parliament. Madame Chantal, a fat lady, whose ideas al-

ways gave me the impression of being carved out square like building stones, was accustomed to exclaiming at the end of every political discussion: "All that is seed which does not promise much for the future!" Why have I always imagined that Madame Chantal's ideas are square? I don't know; but everything that she says takes that shape in my head: a big square, with four symmetrical angles. There are other people whose ideas always strike me as being round and rolling like a hoop. As soon as they begin a sentence on any subject it rolls on and on, coming out in ten, twenty,fifty round ideas, large and small, which I see rolling along, one behind the other, to the end of the horizon. Other people have pointed ideas—but enough of this.

We sat down as usual and finished our dinner without anything out of the ordinary being said. At dessert, the Twelfth Night cake was brought on. Now, M. Chantal had been king every year. I don't know whether this was the result of continued chance or a family convention, but he unfailingly found the bean in his piece of cake, and he would proclaim Madame Chantal to be queen. Therefore, I was greatly surprised to find something very hard, which almost made me break a tooth, in a mouthful of cake. Gently I took this thing from my mouth and I saw that it was a little porcelain doll, no bigger than a bean. Surprise caused me to exclaim: "Ah!" All looked at me, and Chantal clapped his hands and cried: "It's Gaston! It's Gaston! Long live the king! Long live the king!"

All took up the chorus: "Long live the king!" And I blushed to the tip of my ears, as one often does, without any reason at all, in situations which

are a little foolish. I sat there looking at my plate, with this absurd little bit of pottery in my fingers, forcing myself to laugh and not knowing what to do or say, when Chantal once more cried out: "Now, you must choose a queen!"

Then I was thunderstruck. In a second a thousand thoughts and suppositions flashed through my mind. Did they expect me to pick out one of the young Chantal ladies? Was that a trick to make me say which one I prefer? Was it a gentle, light, direct hint of the parents toward a possible marriage? The idea of marriage roams continually in houses with grown-up girls, and takes every shape and disguise, and employs every subterfuge. A dread of compromising myself took hold of me as well as an extreme timidity before the obstinately correct and reserved attitude of the Misses Louise and Pauline. To choose one of them in preference to the other seemed to me as difficult as choosing between two drops of water; and then the fear of launching myself into an affair which might, in spite of me, lead me gently into matrimonial ties, by means as wary and imperceptible and as calm as this insignificant royalty—the fear of all this haunted me.

Suddenly I had an inspiration, and I held out to Mademoiselle Pearl the symbolical emblem. At first every one was surprised, then they doubtless appreciated my delicacy and discretion, for they applauded furiously. Everybody was crying: "Long live the queen! Long live the queen!"

As for herself, poor old maid, she was so amazed that she completely lost control of herself; she was

trembling and stammering: "No—no—oh! no—not me—please—not me—I beg of you——"

Then for the first time in my life I looked at Mademoiselle Pearl and wondered what she was.

I was accustomed to seeing her in this house, just as one sees old upholstered armchairs on which one has been sitting since childhood without ever noticing them. One day, with no reason at all, because a ray of sunshine happens to strike the seat, you suddenly think: "Why, that chair is very curious"; and then you discover that the wood has been worked by a real artist and that the material is remarkable. I had never taken any notice of Mademoiselle Pearl.

She was a part of the Chantal family, that was all. But how? By what right? She was a tall, thin person who tried to remain in the background, but who was by no means insignificant. She was treated in a friendly manner, better than a housekeeper, not so well as a relative. I suddenly observed several shades of distinction which I had never noticed before. Madame Chantal said: "Pearl." The young ladies: "Mademoiselle Pearl," and Chantal only addressed her as "Mademoiselle," with an air of greater respect, perhaps.

I began to observe her. How old could she be? Forty? Yes, forty. She was not old, she made herself old. I was suddenly struck by this fact. She fixed her hair and dressed in a ridiculous manner, and, notwithstanding all that, she was not in the least ridiculous, she had such simple, natural gracefulness, veiled and hidden. Truly, what a strange creature! How was it I had never observed her before? She dressed her hair in a gro-

tesque manner with little old maid curls, most absurd; but beneath this one could see a large, calm brow, cut by two deep lines, two wrinkles of long sadness, then two blue eyes, large and tender, so timid, so bashful, so humble, two beautiful eyes which had kept the expression of naïve wonder of a young girl, of youthful sensations, and also of sorrow, which had softened without spoiling them.

Her whole face was refined and discreet, a face the expression of which seemed to have gone out without being used up or faded by the fatigues and great emotions of life.

What a dainty mouth! and such pretty teeth! But one would have thought that she did not dare smile.

Suddenly I compared her to Madame Chantal! Undoubtedly Mademoiselle Pearl was the better of the two, a hundred times better, daintier, prouder, more noble. I was surprised at my observation. They were pouring out champagne. I held my glass up to the queen and, with a well-turned compliment, I drank to her health. I could see that she felt inclined to hide her head in her napkin. Then, as she was dipping her lips in the clear wine, everybody cried: "The queen drinks! the queen drinks!" She almost turned purple and choked. Everybody was laughing; but I could see that all loved her.

As soon as dinner was over Chantal took me by the arm. It was time for his cigar, a sacred hour. When alone he would smoke it out in the street; when guests came to dinner he would take them to the billiard room and smoke while playing. That evening they had built a fire to celebrate Twelfth

Night; my old friend took his cue, a very fine one, and chalked it with great care; then he said:

"You break, my boy!"

He called me "my boy," although I was twenty-five, but he had known me as a young child.

I started the game and made a few carroms. I missed some others, but as the thought of Mademoiselle Pearl kept returning to my mind, I suddenly asked:

"By the way, Monsieur Chantal, is Mademoiselle Pearl a relative of yours?"

Greatly surprised, he stopped playing and looked at me:

"What! Don't you know? Haven't you heard about Mademoiselle Pearl?"

"No."

"Didn't your father ever tell you?"

"No."

"Well, well, that's funny! That certainly is funny! Why, it's a regular romance!"

He paused, and then continued:

"And if you only knew how peculiar it is that you should ask me that to-day, on Twelfth Night!"

"Why?"

"Why? Well, listen. Forty-one years ago to-day, the day of the Epiphany, the following events occurred: We were then living at Roüy-le-Tors, on the ramparts; but in order that you may understand, I must first explain the house. Roüy is built on a hill, or, rather, on a mound which overlooks a great stretch of prairie. We had a house there with a beautiful hanging garden supported by the old battlemented wall; so that the house was in the town on the streets, while the garden overlooked the

plain. There was a door leading from the garden to the open country, at the bottom of a secret stairway in the thick wall—the kind you read about in novels. A road passed in front of this door, which was provided with a big bell; for the peasants, in order to avoid the roundabout way, would bring their provisions up this way.

"You now understand the place, don't you? Well, this year, at Epiphany, it had been snowing for a week. One might have thought that the world was coming to an end. When we went to the ramparts to look over the plain, this immense white, frozen country, which shone like varnish, would chill our very souls. One might have thought that the Lord had packed the world in cotton to put it away in the storeroom for old worlds. I can assure you that it was dreary looking.

"We were a very numerous family at that time: my father, my mother, my uncle and aunt, my two brothers and four cousins; they were pretty little girls; I married the youngest. Of all that crowd, there are only three of us left: my wife, I, and my sister-in-law, who lives in Marseilles. Zounds! how quickly a family like that dwindles away! I tremble when I think of it! I was fifteen years old then, since I am fifty-six now.

"We were going to celebrate the Epiphany, and we were all happy, very happy! Everybody was in the parlor, awaiting dinner, and my oldest brother, Jacques, said: 'There has been a dog howling out in the plain for about ten minutes; the poor beast must be lost.'

"He had hardly stopped talking when the garden bell began to ring. It had the deep sound of a church

bell, which made one think of death. A shiver ran through everybody. My father called the servant and told him to go outside and look. We waited in complete silence; we were thinking of the snow which covered the ground. When the man returned he declared that he had seen nothing. The dog kept up its ceaseless howling, and always from the same spot.

"We sat down to dinner; but we were all uneasy, especially the young people. Everything went well up to the roast, then the bell began to ring again, three times in succession, three heavy, long strokes which vibrated to the tips of our fingers and which stopped our conversation short. We sat there looking at each other, fork in the air, still listening, and shaken by a kind of supernatural fear.

"At last my mother spoke: 'It's surprising that they should have waited so long to come back. Do not go alone, Baptiste; one of these gentlemen will accompany you.'

"My Uncle François arose. He was a kind of Hercules, very proud of his strength, and feared nothing in the world. My father said to him: 'Take a gun. There is no telling what it might be.'

"But my uncle only took a cane and went out with the servant.

"We others remained there trembling with fear and apprehension, without eating or speaking. My father tried to reassure us: 'Just wait and see,' he said; 'it will be some beggar or some traveller lost in the snow. After ringing once, seeing that the door was not immediately opened, he attempted again to find his way, and being unable to, he has returned to our door.'

"Our uncle seemed to stay away an hour. At last he came back, furious, swearing: 'Nothing at all; it's some practical joker! There is nothing but that damned dog howling away at about a hundred yards from the walls. If I had taken a gun I would have killed him to make him keep quiet.'

"We sat down to dinner again, but every one was excited; we felt that all was not over, that something was going to happen, that the bell would soon ring again.

"It rang just as the Twelfth Night cake was being cut. All the men jumped up together. My Uncle François, who had been drinking champagne, swore so furiously that he would murder *it,* whatever it might be, that my mother and my aunt threw themselves on him to prevent his going. My father, although very calm and a little helpless (he limped ever since he had broken his leg when thrown by a horse), declared, in turn, that he wished to find out what was the matter and that he was going. My brothers, aged eighteen and twenty, ran to get their guns; and as no one was paying any attention to me I snatched up a little rifle that was used in the garden and got ready to accompany the expedition.

"It started out immediately. My father and uncle were walking ahead with Baptiste, who was carrying a lantern. My brothers, Jacques and Paul, followed, and I trailed on behind in spite of the prayers of my mother, who stood in front of the house with her sister and my cousins.

"It had been snowing again for the last hour, and the trees were weighted down. The pines were bending under this heavy, white garment, and looked like white pyramids or enormous sugar cones, and

through the gray curtains of small hurrying flakes could be seen the lighter bushes which stood out pale in the shadow. The snow was falling so thick that we could hardly see ten feet ahead of us. But the lantern threw a bright light around us. When we began to go down the winding stairway in the wall I really grew frightened. I felt as though some one were walking behind me, were going to grab me by the shoulders and carry me away, and I felt a strong desire to return; but, as I would have had to cross the garden all alone, I did not dare. I heard some one opening the door leading to the plain; my uncle began to swear again, exclaiming: 'By ——! He has gone again! If I can catch sight of even his shadow, I'll take care not to miss him, the swine!'

"It was a discouraging thing to see this great expanse of plain, or, rather, to feel it before us, for we could not see it; we could only see a thick, endless veil of snow, above, below, opposite us, to the right, to the left, everywhere. My uncle continued: 'Listen! There is the dog howling again; I will teach him how I shoot. That will be something gained, anyhow.'

"But my father, who was kind-hearted, went on: 'It will be much better to go on and get the poor animal, who is crying for hunger. The poor fellow is barking for help; he is calling like a man in distress. Let us go to him.'

"So we started out through this mist, through this thick, continuous fall of snow, which filled the air, which moved, floated, fell, and chilled the skin with a burning sensation like a sharp, rapid pain as each flake melted. We were sinking in up to our

knees in this soft, cold mass, and we had to lift our feet very high in order to walk. As we advanced the dog's voice became clearer and stronger. My uncle cried: 'Here he is!' We stopped to observe him as one does when he meets an enemy at night.

"I could see nothing, so I ran up to the others, and I caught sight of him; he was frightful and weird-looking; he was a big black shepherd's dog with long hair and a wolf's head, standing just within the gleam of light cast by our lantern on the snow. He did not move; he was silently watching us.

"My uncle said: 'That's peculiar, he is neither advancing nor retreating. I feel like taking a shot at him.'

"My father answered in a firm voice: 'No, we must capture him.'

"Then my brother Jacques added: 'But he is not alone. There is something behind him.'"

"There was indeed something behind him, something gray, impossible to distinguish. We started out again cautiously. When he saw us approaching the dog sat down. He did not look wicked. Instead, he seemed pleased at having been able to attract the attention of some one.

"My father went straight to him and petted him. The dog licked his hands. We saw that he was tied to the wheel of a little carriage, a sort of toy carriage entirely wrapped up in three or four woolen blankets. We carefully took off these coverings, and as Baptiste approached his lantern to the front of this little vehicle, which looked like a rolling kennel, we saw in it a little baby sleeping peacefully.

"We were so astonished that we couldn't speak.

My father was the first to collect his wits, and as he had a warm heart and a broad mind, he stretched his hand over the roof of the carriage and said: 'Poor little waif, you shall be one of us!' And he ordered my brother Jacques to roll the foundling ahead of us. Thinking out loud, my father continued:

"'Some child of love whose poor mother rang at my door on this night of Epiphany in memory of the Child of God.'

"He once more stopped and called at the top of his lungs through the night to the four corners of the heavens: 'We have found it!' Then, putting his hand on his brother's shoulder, he murmured: 'What if you had shot the dog, François?'

"My uncle did not answer, but in the darkness he crossed himself, for, notwithstanding his blustering manner, he was very religious.

"The dog, which had been untied, was following us.

"Ah! But you should have seen us when we got to the house! At first we had a lot of trouble in getting the carriage up through the winding stairway; but we succeeded and even rolled it into the vestibule.

"How funny mamma was! How happy and astonished! And my four little cousins (the youngest was only six), they looked like four chickens around a nest. At last we took the child from the carriage. It was still sleeping. It was a girl about six weeks old. In its clothes we found ten thousand francs in gold, yes, my boy, ten thousand francs!—which papa saved for her dowry. Therefore, it was not a child of poor people, but, perhaps,

the child of some nobleman and a little bourgeoise of the town—or again—we made a thousand suppositions, but we never found out anything—never the slightest clue. The dog himself was recognized by no one. He was a stranger in the country. At any rate, the person who rang three times at our door must have known my parents well, to have chosen them thus.

"That is how, at the age of six weeks, Mademoiselle Pearl entered the Chantal household.

"It was not until later that she was called Mademoiselle Pearl. She was at first baptized 'Marie Simonne Claire,' Claire being intended for her family name.

"I can assure you that our return to the dining-room was amusing, with this baby now awake and looking round her at these people and these lights with her vague blue questioning eyes.

"We sat down to dinner again and the cake was cut. I was king, and for queen I took Mademoiselle Pearl, just as you did to-day. On that day she did not appreciate the honor that was being shown her.

"Well, the child was adopted and brought up in the family. She grew, and the years flew by. She was so gentle and loving and minded so well that every one would have spoiled her abominably had not my mother prevented it.

"My mother was an orderly woman with a great respect for class distinctions. She consented to treat little Claire as she did her own sons, but, nevertheless, she wished the distance which separated us to be well marked, and our positions well established. Therefore, as soon as the child could under-

stand, she acquainted her with her story and gently, even tenderly, impressed on the little one's mind that, for the Chantals, she was an adopted daughter, taken in, but, nevertheless, a stranger. Claire understood the situation with peculiar intelligence and with surprising instinct; she knew how to take the place which was allotted her, and to keep it with so much tact, gracefulness and gentleness that she often brought tears to my father's eyes. My mother herself was often moved by the passionate gratitude and timid devotion of this dainty and loving little creature that she began calling her: 'My daughter.' At times, when the little one had done something kind and good, my mother would raise her spectacles on her forehead, a thing which always indicated emotion with her, and she would repeat: 'This child is a pearl, a perfect pearl!' This name stuck to the little Claire, who became and remained for us Mademoiselle Pearl."

M. Chantal stopped. He was sitting on the edge of the billiard table, his feet hanging, and was playing with a ball with his left hand, while with his right he crumpled a rag which served to rub the chalk marks from the slate. A little red in the face, his voice thick, he was talking away to himself now, lost in his memories, gently drifting through the old scenes and events which awoke in his mind, just as we walk through old family gardens where we were brought up and where each tree, each walk, each hedge reminds us of some occurrence.

I stood opposite him, leaning against the wall, my hands resting on my idle cue.

After a slight pause he continued:

"By Jove! She was pretty at eighteen—and graceful—and perfect. Ah! She was so sweet—and good and true—and charming! She had such eyes—blue—transparent—clear—such eyes as I have never seen since!"

He was once more silent. I asked: "Why did she never marry?"

He answered, not to me, but to the word "marry" which had caught his ear: "Why? why? She never would—she never would! She had a dowry of thirty thousand francs, and she received several offers—but she never would! She seemed sad at that time. That was when I married my cousin, little Charlotte, my wife, to whom I had been engaged for six years."

I looked at M. Chantal, and it seemed to me that I was looking into his very soul, and I was suddenly witnessing one of those humble and cruel tragedies of honest, straightforward, blameless hearts, one of those secret tragedies known to no one, not even the silent and resigned victims. A rash curiosity suddenly impelled me to exclaim:

"*You* should have married her, Monsieur Chantal!"

He started, looked at me, and said:

"I? Marry whom?"

"Mademoiselle Pearl."

"Why?"

"Because you loved her more than your cousin."

He stared at me with strange, round, bewildered eyes and stammered:

"I loved her—I? How? Who told you that?"

"Why, anyone can see that—and it's even on ac-

count of her that you delayed for so long your marriage to your cousin who had been waiting for you for six years."

He dropped the ball which he was holding in his left hand, and, seizing the chalk rag in both hands, he buried his face in it and began to sob. He was weeping with his eyes, nose and mouth in a heart-breaking yet ridiculous manner, like a sponge which one squeezes. He was coughing, spitting and blowing his nose in the chalk rag, wiping his eyes and sneezing; then the tears would again begin to flow down the wrinkles on his face and he would make a strange gurgling noise in his throat. I felt bewildered, ashamed; I wanted to run away, and I no longer knew what to say, do, or attempt.

Suddenly Madame Chantal's voice sounded on the stairs. "Haven't you men almost finished smoking your cigars?"

I opened the door and cried: "Yes, madame, we are coming right down."

Then I rushed to her husband, and, seizing him by the shoulders, I cried: "Monsieur Chantal, my friend Chantal, listen to me; your wife is calling; pull yourself together, we must go downstairs."

He stammered: "Yes—yes—I am coming—poor girl! I am coming—tell her that I am coming."

He began conscientiously to wipe his face on the cloth which, for the last two or three years, had been used for marking off the chalk from the slate; then he appeared, half white and half red, his forehead, nose, cheeks and chin covered with chalk, and his eyes swollen, still full of tears.

I caught him by the hands and dragged him into his bedroom, muttering: "I beg your pardon, I beg

your pardon, Monsieur Chantal, for having caused you such sorrow—but—I did not know—you—you understand."

He squeezed my hand, saying: "Yes—yes—there are difficult moments."

Then he plunged his face into a bowl of water. When he emerged from it he did not yet seem to me to be presentable; but I thought of a little stratagem. As he was growing worried, looking at himself in the mirror, I said to him: "All you have to do is to say that a little dust flew into your eye and you can cry before everybody to your heart's content."

He went downstairs rubbing his eyes with his handkerchief. All were worried; each one wished to look for the speck, which could not be found; and stories were told of similar cases where it had been necessary to call in a physician.

I went over to Mademoiselle Pearl and watched her, tormented by an ardent curiosity, which was turning to positive suffering. She must indeed have been pretty, with her gentle, calm eyes, so large that it looked as though she never closed them like other mortals. Her gown was a little ridiculous, a real old maid's gown, which was unbecoming without appearing clumsy.

It seemed to me as though I were looking into her soul, just as I had into Monsieur Chantal's; that I was looking right from one end to the other of this humble life, so simple and devoted. I felt an irresistible longing to question her, to find out whether she, too, had loved him; whether she also had suffered, as he had, from this long, secret, poignant grief, which one cannot see, know, or guess,

but which breaks forth at night in the loneliness of the dark room. I was watching her, and I could observe her heart beating under her waist, and I wondered whether this sweet, candid face had wept on the soft pillow and she had sobbed, her whole body shaken by the violence of her anguish.

I said to her in a low voice, like a child who is breaking a toy to see what is inside: "If you could have seen Monsieur Chantal crying a while ago it would have moved you."

She started, asking: "What? He was weeping?"

"Ah, yes, he was indeed weeping!"

"Why?"

She seemed deeply moved. I answered:

"On your account."

"On my account?"

"Yes. He was telling me how much he had loved you in the days gone by; and what a pang it had given him to marry his cousin instead of you."

Her pale face seemed to grow a little longer; her calm eyes, which always remained open, suddenly closed so quickly that they seemed shut forever. She slipped from her chair to the floor, and slowly, gently sank down as would a fallen garment.

I cried: "Help! help! Mademoiselle Pearl is ill."

Madame Chantal and her daughters rushed forward, and while they were looking for towels, water and vinegar, I grabbed my hat and ran away.

I walked away with rapid strides, my heart heavy, my mind full of remorse and regret. And yet sometimes I felt pleased; I felt as though I had done a praiseworthy and necessary act. I was asking myself: "Did I do wrong or right?" They had

that shut up in their hearts, just as some people carry a bullet in a closed wound. Will they not be happier now? It was too late for their torture to begin over again and early enough for them to remember it with tenderness.

And perhaps some evening next spring, moved by a beam of moonlight falling through the branches on the grass at their feet, they will join and press their hands in memory of all this cruel and suppressed suffering; and, perhaps, also this short embrace may infuse in their veins a little of this thrill which they would not have known without it, and will give to those two dead souls, brought to life in a second, the rapid and divine sensation of this intoxication, of this madness which gives to lovers more happiness in an instant than other men can gather during a whole lifetime!

# THE THIEF

WHILE apparently thinking of something else, Dr. Sorbier had been listening quietly to those amazing accounts of burglaries and daring deeds that might have been taken from the trial of Cartouche. "Assuredly," he exclaimed, "assuredly, I know of no viler fault nor any meaner action than to attack a girl's innocence, to corrupt her, to profit by a moment of unconscious weakness and of madness, when her heart is beating like that of a frightened fawn, and her pure lips seek those of her tempter; when she abandons herself without thinking of the irremediable stain, nor of her fall, nor of the morrow.

"The man who has brought this about slowly, viciously, who can tell with what science of evil, and who, in such a case, has not steadiness and self-restraint enough to quench that flame by some icy words, who has not sense enough for two, who cannot recover his self-possession and master the runaway brute within him, and who loses his head on the edge of the precipice over which she is going to fall, is as contemptible as any man who breaks open a lock, or as any rascal on the lookout for a house left defenceless and unprotected or for some easy and dishonest stroke of business, or as that thief whose various exploits you have just related to us.

"I, for my part, utterly refuse to absolve him, even when extenuating circumstances plead in his favor, even when he is carrying on a dangerous flirtation, in which a man tries in vain to keep his balance, not to exceed the limits of the game, any more than at lawn tennis; even when the parts are inverted and a man's adversary is some precocious, curious, seductive girl, who shows you immediately that she has nothing to learn and nothing to experience, except the last chapter of love, one of those girls from whom may fate always preserve our sons, and whom a psychological novel writer has christened 'The Semi-Virgins.'

"It is, of course, difficult and painful for that coarse and unfathomable vanity which is characteristic of every man, and which might be called *malism,* not to stir such a charming fire, difficult to act the Joseph and the fool, to turn away his eyes, and, as it were, to put wax into his ears, like the companions of Ulysses when they were attracted by the divine, seductive songs of the Sirens, difficult only to touch that pretty table, covered with a perfectly new cloth, at which you are invited to take a seat before any one else, in such a suggestive voice, and are requested to quench your thirst and to taste that new wine, whose fresh and strange flavor you will never forget. But who would hesitate to exercise such self-restraint if, when he rapidly examines his conscience, in one of those instinctive returns to his sober self in which a man thinks clearly and recovers his head, he were to measure the gravity of his fault, consider it, think of its consequences, of the reprisals, of the uneasiness

which he would always feel in the future, and which would destroy the repose and happiness of his life?

"You may guess that behind all these moral reflections, such as a graybeard like myself may indulge in, there is a story hidden, and, sad as it is, I am sure it will interest you on account of the strange heroism it shows."

He was silent for a few moments, as if to classify his recollections, and, with his elbows resting on the arms of his easy-chair and his eyes looking into space, he continued in the slow voice of a hospital professor who is explaining a case to his class of medical students, at a bedside:

"He was one of those men who, as our grandfathers used to say, never met with a cruel woman, the type of the adventurous knight who was always foraging, who had something of the scamp about him, but who despised danger and was bold even to rashness. He was ardent in the pursuit of pleasure, and had an irresistible charm about him, one of those men in whom we excuse the greatest excesses as the most natural things in the world. He had run through all his money at gambling and with pretty girls, and so became, as it were, a soldier of fortune. He amused himself whenever and however he could, and was at that time quartered at Versailles.

"I knew him to the very depths of his childlike heart, which was only too easily seen through and sounded, and I loved him as some old bachelor uncle loves a nephew who plays him tricks, but who knows how to coax him. He had made me his confidant rather than his adviser, kept me informed of his slightest pranks, though he always pretended

to be speaking about one of his friends, and not about himself; and I must confess that his youthful impetuosity, his careless gaiety, and his amorous ardor sometimes distracted my thoughts and made me envy the handsome, vigorous young fellow who was so happy at being alive, that I had not the courage to check him, to show him the right road, and to call out to him: 'Take care!' as children do at blind man's buff.

"And one day, after one of those interminable cotillons, where the couples do not leave each other for hours, and can disappear together without anybody thinking of noticing them, the poor fellow at last discovered what love was, that real love which takes up its abode in the very centre of the heart and in the brain, and is proud of being there, and which rules like a sovereign and a tyrannous master, and he became desperately enamored of a pretty but badly brought up girl, who was as disquieting and wayward as she was pretty.

"She loved him, however, or rather she idolized him despotically, madly, with all her enraptured soul and all her being. Left to do as she pleased by imprudent and frivolous parents, suffering from neurosis, in consequence of the unwholesome friendships which she contracted at the convent school, instructed by what she saw and heard and knew was going on around her, in spite of her deceitful and artificial conduct, knowing that neither her father nor her mother, who were very proud of their race as well as avaricious, would ever agree to let her marry the man whom she had taken a liking to, that handsome fellow who had little besides visionary ideas and debts, and who belonged to the middle

class, she laid aside all scruples, thought of nothing but of becoming his, no matter what might be the cost.

"By degrees, the unfortunate man's strength gave way, his heart softened, and he allowed himself to be carried away by that current which buffeted him, surrounded him, and left him on the shore like a waif and a stray.

"They wrote letters full of madness to each other, and not a day passed without their meeting, either accidentally, as it seemed, or at parties and balls. She had yielded her lips to him in long, ardent caresses, which had sealed their compact of mutual passion."

The doctor stopped, and his eyes suddenly filled with tears, as these former troubles came back to his mind; and then, in a hoarse voice, he went on, full of the horror of what he was going to relate:

"For months he scaled the garden wall, and, holding his breath and listening for the slightest noise, like a burglar who is going to break into a house, he went in by the servants' entrance, which she had left open, slunk barefoot down a long passage and up the broad staircase, which creaked occasionally, to the second story, where his sweetheart's room was, and stayed there for hours.

"One night, when it was darker than usual, and he was hurrying lest he should be later than the time agreed on, he knocked up against a piece of furniture in the anteroom and upset it. It so happened that the girl's mother had not gone to sleep, either because she had a sick headache, or else because she had sat up late over some novel, and, frightened at that unusual noise which disturbed

the silence of the house, she jumped out of bed, opened the door, saw some one indistinctly running away and keeping close to the wall, and, immediately thinking that there were burglars in the house, she aroused her husband and the servants by her frantic screams. The unfortunate man understood the situation, and, seeing what a terrible fix he was in, and preferring to be taken for a common thief to dishonoring his adored one's name, he ran into the drawing-room, felt on the tables and what-nots, filled his pockets at random with valuable bric-à-brac, and then cowered down behind the grand piano, which barred the corner of a large room.

"The servants, who had run in with lighted candles, found him, and, overwhelming him with abuse, seized him by the collar and dragged him, panting and apparently half dead with shame and terror, to the nearest police station. He defended himself with intentional awkwardness when he was brought up for trial, kept up his part with the most perfect self-possession and without any signs of the despair and anguish that he felt in his heart, and, condemned and degraded and made to suffer martyrdom in his honor as a man and a soldier—he was an officer—he did not protest, but went to prison as one of those criminals whom society gets rid of like noxious vermin.

"He died there of misery and of bitterness of spirit, with the name of the fair-haired idol, for whom he had sacrificed himself, on his lips, as if it had been an ecstatic prayer, and he intrusted his will to the priest who administered extreme unction to him, and requested him to give it to me. In it, without mentioning anybody, and without in the

least lifting the veil, he at last explained the enigma, and cleared himself of those accusations the terrible burden of which he had borne until his last breath.

"I have always thought myself, though I do not know why, that the girl married and had several charming children, whom she brought up with the austere strictness and in the serious piety of former days!"

# INDISCRETION

THEY had loved each other before marriage with a pure and lofty love. They had first met on the sea-shore. He had thought this young girl charming, as she passed by with her light-colored parasol and her dainty dress amid the marine landscape against the horizon. He had loved her, blond and slender, in these surroundings of blue ocean and spacious sky. He could not distinguish the tenderness which this budding woman awoke in him from the vague and powerful emotion which the fresh salt air and the grand scenery of surf and sunshine and waves aroused in his soul.

She, on the other hand, had loved him because he courted her, because he was young, rich, kind, and attentive. She had loved him because it is natural for young girls to love men who whisper sweet nothings to them.

So, for three months, they had lived side by side, and hand in hand. The greeting which they exchanged in the morning before the bath, in the freshness of the morning, or in the evening on the sand, under the stars, i the warmth of a calm night, whispered low, very low, already had the flavor of kisses, though their lips had never met.

Each dreamed of the other at night, each thought of the other on awaking, and, without yet having

voiced their sentiments, each longer for the other, body and soul.

After marriage their love descended to earth. It was at first a tireless, sensuous passion, then exalted tenderness composed of tangible poetry, more refined caresses, and new and foolish inventions. Every glance and gesture was an expression of passion.

But, little by little, without even noticing it, they began to get tired of each other. Love was still strong, but they had nothing more to reveal to each other, nothing more to learn from each other, no new tale of endearment, no unexpected outburst, no new way of expressing the well-known, oft-repeated verb.

They tried, however, to rekindle the dwindling flame of the first love. Every day they tried some new trick or desperate attempt to bring back to their hearts the uncooled ardor of their first days of married life. They tried moonlight walks under the trees, in the sweet warmth of the summer evenings; the poetry of mist-covered beaches; the excitement of public festivals.

One morning Henriette said to Paul:

"Will you take me to a café for dinner?"

"Certainly, dearie."

"To some well-known café?"

"Of course!"

He looked at her with a questioning glance, seeing that she was thinking of something which she did not wish to tell.

She went on:

"You know, one of those cafés—oh, how can I explain myself?—a sporty café!"

He smiled: "Of course, I understand—you mean

in one of the cafés which are commonly called bohemian."

"Yes, that's it. But take me to one of the big places, one where you are known, one where you have already supped—no—dined—well, you know—I—I—oh! I will never dare say it!"

"Go ahead, dearie. Little secrets should no longer exist between us."

"No, I dare not."

"Go on; don't be prudish. Tell me."

"Well, I—I—I want to be taken for your sweetheart—there! and I want the boys, who do not know that you are married, to take me for such; and you too—I want you to think that I am your sweetheart for one hour, in that place which must hold so many memories for you. There! And I will play that I am your sweetheart. It's awful, I know—I am abominably ashamed, I am as red as a peony. Don't look at me!"

He laughed, greatly amused, and answered:

"All right, we will go to-night to a very swell place where I am well known."

Toward seven o'clock they went up the stairs of one of the big cafés on the Boulevard, he, smiling, with the look of a conqueror, she, timid, veiled, delighted. They were immediately shown to one of the luxurious private dining-rooms, furnished with four large arm-chairs and a red plush couch. The head waiter entered and brought them the menu. Paul handed it to his wife.

"What do you want to eat?"

"I don't care; order whatever is good."

After handing his coat to the waiter, he ordered dinner and champagne.

The waiter looked at the young woman and smiled. He took the order and murmured:

"Will Monsieur Paul have his champagne sweet or dry?"

"Dry, very dry."

Henriette was pleased to hear that this man knew her husband's name.

They sat on the couch, side by side, and began to eat.

Ten candles lighted the room and were reflected in the mirrors all around them, which seemed to increase the brilliancy a thousand-fold.

Henriette drank glass after glass in order to keep up her courage, although she felt dizzy after the first few glasses. Paul, excited by the memories which returned to him, kept kissing his wife's hands. His eyes were sparkling.

She was feeling strangely excited in this new place, restless, pleased, a little guilty, but full of life. Two waiters, serious, silent, accustomed to seeing and forgetting everything, to entering the room only when it was necessary and to leaving it when they felt they were intruding, were silently flitting hither and thither.

Toward the middle of the dinner, Henriette was well under the influence of champagne. She was prattling along fearlessly, her cheeks flushed, her eyes glistening.

"Come, Paul; tell me everything."

"What, sweetheart?"

"I don't dare tell you."

"Go on!"

"Have you loved many women before me?"

He hesitated, a little perplexed, not knowing whether he should hide his adventures or boast of them.

She continued:

"Oh! please tell me. How many have you loved?"

"A few."

"How many?"

"I don't know. How do you expect me to know such things?"

"Haven't you counted them?"

"Of course not."

"Then you must have loved a good many!"

"Perhaps."

"About how many? Just tell me about how many."

"But I don't know, dearest. Some years a good many, and some years only a few."

"How many a year, did you say?"

"Sometimes twenty or thirty, sometimes only four or five."

"Oh! that makes more than a hundred in all!"

"Yes, just about."

"Oh! I think that is dreadful!"

"Why dreadful?"

"Because it's dreadful when you think of it—all those women—and always—always the same thing. Oh! it's dreadful, just the same—more than a hundred women!"

He was surprised that she should think that dreadful, and answered, with the air of superiority which

men take with women when they wish to make them understand that they have said something foolish:

"That's funny! If it is dreadful to have a hundred women, it's dreadful to have one."

"Oh, no, not at all!"

"Why not?"

"Because with one woman you have a real bond of love which attaches you to her, while with a hundred women it's not the same at all. There is no real love. I don't understand how a man can associate with such women."

"But they are all right."

"No, they can't be!"

"Yes, they are!"

"Oh, stop; you disgust me!"

"But then, why did you ask me how many sweethearts I had had?"

"Because——"

"That's no reason!"

"What were they—actresses, little shop-girls, or society women?"

"A few of each."

"It must have been rather monotonous toward the last."

"Oh, no; it's amusing to change."

She remained thoughtful, staring at her champagne glass. It was full—she drank it in one gulp; then putting it back on the table, she threw her arms around her husband's neck and murmured in his ear:

"Oh! how I love you, sweetheart! how I love you!"

He threw his arms around her in a passionate embrace. A waiter, who was just entering, backed

out, closing the door discreetly. In about five minutes the head waiter came back, solemn and dignified, bringing the fruit for dessert. She was once more holding between her fingers a full glass, and gazing into the amber liquid as though seeking unknown things. She murmured in a dreamy voice:

"Yes, it must be fun!"

# THE MUSTACHE

CHÂTEAU DE SOLLES,
July 30, 1883.

MY DEAR LUCY:

I have no news. We live in the drawing-room, looking out at the rain. We cannot go out in this frightful weather, so we have theatricals. How stupid they are, my dear, these drawing entertainments in the repertory of real life! All is forced, coarse, heavy. The jokes are like cannon balls, smashing everything in their passage. No wit, nothing natural, no sprightliness, no elegance. These literary men, in truth, know nothing of society. They are perfectly ignorant of how people think and talk in our set. I do not mind if they despise our customs, our conventionalities, but I do not forgive them for not knowing them. When they want to be humorous they make puns that would do for a barrack; when they try to be jolly, they give us jokes that they must have picked up on the outer boulevard in those beer houses artists are supposed to frequent, where one has heard the same students' jokes for fifty years.

So we have taken to theatricals. As we are only two women, my husband takes the part of a soubrette, and, in order to do that, he has shaved off his mustache. You cannot imagine, my dear Lucy, how it changes him! I no longer recognize him—by day

or at night. If he did not let it grow again I think I should no longer love him; he looks so horrid like this.

In fact, a man without a mustache is no longer a man. I do not care much for a beard; it almost always makes a man look untidy. But a mustache, oh, a mustache is indispensable to a manly face. No, you would never believe how these little hair bristles on the upper lip are a relief to the eye and good in other ways. I have thought over the matter a great deal, but hardly dare to write my thoughts. Words look so different on paper and the subject is so difficult, so delicate, so dangerous that it requires infinite skill to tackle it.

Well, when my husband appeared, shaven, I understood at once that I never could fall in love with a strolling actor nor a preacher, even if it were Father Didon, the most charming of all! Later when I was alone with him (my husband) it was worse still. Oh, my dear Lucy, never let yourself be kissed by a man without a mustache; their kisses have no flavor, none whatever! They no longer have the charm, the mellowness and the snap—yes, the snap—of a real kiss. The mustache is the spice.

Imagine placing to your lips a piece of dry—or moist—parchment. That is the kiss of the man without a mustache. It is not worth while.

Whence comes this charm of the mustache, will you tell me? Do I know myself? It tickles your face, you feel it approaching your mouth and it sends a little shiver through you down to the tips of your toes.

And on your neck! Have you ever felt a mustache on your neck? It intoxicates you, makes you

feel creepy, goes to the tips of your fingers. You wriggle, shake your shoulders, toss back your head. You wish to get away and at the same time to remain there; it is delightful, but irritating. But how good it is!

A lip without a mustache is like a body without clothing; and one must wear clothes, very few, if you like, but still some clothing.

I recall a sentence (uttered by a politician) which has been running in my mind for three months. My husband, who keeps up with the newspapers, read me one evening a very singular speech by our Minister of Agriculture, who was called M. Méline. He may have been superseded by this time. I do not know.

I was paying no attention, but the name Méline struck me. It recalled, I do not exactly know why, the Scènes de la vie de bohème. I thought it was about some grisette. That shows how scraps of the speech entered my mind. This M. Méline was making this statement to the people of Amiens, I believe, and I have ever since been trying to understand what he meant: "There is no patriotism without agriculture!" Well, I have just discovered his meaning, and I affirm in my turn that there is no love without a mustache. When you say it that way it sounds comical, does it not?

There is no love without a mustache!

"There is no patriotism without agriculture," said M. Méline, and he was right, that minister; I now understand why.

From a very different point of view the mustache is essential. It gives character to the face. It makes a man look gentle, tender, violent, a monster, a rake,

enterprising! The hairy man, who does not shave off his whiskers, never has a refined look, for his features are concealed, and the shape of the jaw and the chin betrays a great deal to those who understand.

The man with a mustache retains his own peculiar expression and his refinement at the same time.

And how many different varieties of mustaches there are! Sometimes they are twisted, curled, coquettish. Those seem to be chiefly devoted to women.

Sometimes they are pointed, sharp as needles, and threatening. That kind prefers wine, horses and war.

Sometimes they are enormous, overhanging, frightful. These big ones generally conceal a fine disposition, a kindliness that borders on weakness and a gentleness that savors of timidity.

But what I adore above all in the mustache is that it is French, altogether French. It came from our ancestors, the Gauls, and has remained the insignia of our national character.

It is boastful, gallant and brave. It sips wine gracefully and knows how to laugh with refinement, while the broad-bearded jaws are clumsy in everything they do.

I recall something that made me weep all my tears and also—I see it now—made me love a mustache on a man's face.

It was during the war, when I was living with my father. I was a young girl then. One day there was a skirmish near the château. I had heard the firing of the cannon and of the artillery all the morning, and that evening a German colonel came and took up his abode in our house. He left the following day.

My father was informed that there were a number of dead bodies in the fields. He had them brought to our place so that they might be buried together. They were laid all along the great avenue of pines as fast as they brought them in, on both sides of the avenue, and as they began to smell unpleasant, their bodies were covered with earth until the deep trench could be dug. Thus one saw only their heads, which seemed to protrude from the clayey earth and were almost as yellow, with their closed eyes.

I wanted to see them. But when I saw those two rows of frightful faces, I thought I should faint. However, I began to look at them, one by one, trying to guess what kind of men these had been.

The uniforms were concealed beneath the earth, and yet immediately, yes, immediately, my dear, I recognized the Frenchmen by their mustache!

Some of them had shaved on the very day of the battle, as though they wished to be elegant up to the last; others seemed to have a week's growth, but all wore the French mustache, very plain, the proud mustache that seems to say: "Do not take me for my bearded friend, little one; I am a brother."

And I cried, oh, I cried a great deal more than I should if I had not recognized them, the poor dead fellows.

It was wrong of me to tell you this. Now I am sad and cannot chatter any longer. Well, good-by, dear Lucy. I send you a hearty kiss. Long live the mustache!

JEANNE.

# CHECKMATE

I WAS going to Turin by way of Corsica. At Nice I took the boat for Bastia, and as soon as we were started I noticed a rather pretty, modest-looking young woman seated on the deck. She was looking away into the distance with a far-away expression in her eyes.

I seated myself opposite her and looked at her, asking myself the questions which come to one's mind on seeing an unknown woman who interests you: What was her condition, her age, her disposition? Then through what you see you guess what you do not know. With your eyes you notice the length of the waist when she is seated, you try to discover her ankle, you observe the quality of the hand, which reveals the refinement of all one's affections, and the ear, which indicates origin better than a birth certificate. You try to hear her speak in order to understand the nature of her mind and the tendencies of her heart through the intonations of her voice. For the quality of the voice and the choice of words unfold to an experienced observer the whole mysterious texture of the soul.

I was therefore attentively observing my neighbor, looking for signs, analyzing gestures, expecting a revelation at every minute.

She opened a little bag and drew out a news-

paper. I rubbed my hands. "Tell me what you read, and I will tell you what you think."

She began to read with a look of pleasure and of relish. The title of the sheet was the *Echo de Paris*. I was perplexed. She was reading an article by Scholl. Was she a Schollist? She began to smile. Was she one of his opponents? It was difficult to make her out.

I sat down beside her and began to read, with no less attention, a volume of poetry which I had bought before leaving, the "Song of Love," by Felix Frank.

I noticed that she took in the title with a rapid glance, just as a flying bird snatches up a fly. Several of the passengers passed by in order to look at her. But she seemed only to be thinking of her article. When she had finished it, she laid the paper down between us.

Bowing, I said to her:

"Madame, may I glance at this paper?"

"Certainly, sir."

"In the meanwhile, allow me to offer you this volume of verse."

"Thank you, sir; is it amusing?"

I was a little disturbed at this question. One does not ask if a volume of poetry is amusing. I answered:

"It is better than that, it is charming, delicate and very artistic."

"Then let me see it."

She took the volume, opened it and began to glance through it with a little surprised air which showed that she was not in the habit of reading poetry.

At times she seemed moved; at others, she smiled, but with a different smile from the one she had when reading the newspaper.

Suddenly I asked her: "Does it please you?"

"Yes, but I like things that are cheerful, very cheerful. I am not at all sentimental."

We began to talk. I found out that she was the wife of a captain of dragoons, stationed at Ajaccio, and that she was going to join her husband.

In a few minutes I guessed that she did not love him very much. She loved him, however, but with reserve, as one loves a man who has not lived up to what was expected of him before marriage. He had taken her from garrison to garrison, through a lot of dreadful little towns. Now he was calling her to this dismal island. No, life was not amusing for everybody. She would even have preferred remaining with her parents in Lyons, for there she knew everybody. But now she had to go to Corsica. Really, the Secretary of War was not at all nice to her husband, who had deserved well of the government.

We spoke of the places in which she would have preferred to live, and I asked:

"Do you like Paris?"

She exclaimed:

"Oh! monsieur, do I like Paris? Is it possible to ask such a question?" And she began to talk to me of Paris with such ardor, such enthusiasm, such envy, that I thought to myself: "That's the string to play on."

She adored Paris from a distance with the exasperated passion of a woman from the country, with the wild impatience of a captive bird which is watch-

ing a forest all day from the window in which his cage is hung.

She began to question me hurriedly; she wished to learn everything in five minutes. She knew the names of all the well-known people, and of many others of whom I had never heard.

"How is M. Gounod? And M. Sardou? Oh! monsieur, I do so love Sardou's plays! They are so bright and witty! Each time I see one of them I dream of it for a week! I also read one of M. Daudet's books, which pleased me so much! 'Sapho,' do you know it? Is M. Daudet handsome? Have you seen him? And M. Zola, what kind of a man is he? If you knew how 'Germinal' made me cry! Do you remember where the little child dies in the darkness? Isn't it terrible? I was almost sick after reading it! Really! I also read a book by M. Bourget, 'Cruelle énigme.' I have a girl cousin who went so wild about that novel that she wrote to M. Bourget. I found that book too poetic. I prefer humorous things. Do you know M. Grévin? And M. Coquelin? And M. Damala? And M. Rochefort? They say he is so witty! And M. de Cassagnac? I heard that he has a duel every day!"

* * * * * *

After about an hour, this rapid-fire questioning began to slow down; and having satisfied her curiosity to the full extent of my fantastical imagination, I was at liberty to pick my own subjects of conversation.

I told her stories of gay Parisian life. She drank them in with both eyes and ears. She must certainly have conceived a strange idea of the great, well-known ladies of Paris. They were all stories of

clandestine appointments, rapid conquests and sad separations. From time to time she would ask me:

"Oh! is that the way they live?"

I answered with a sly smile:

"Of course the average middle-class families lead an uneventful, monotonous life, out of respect for virtue, a virtue for which no one gives them credit."

I began to sneer at virtue. I talked carelessly of the poor fools who go through life without ever having known the good, sweet things, without ever having tasted the delicious pleasures of stolen kisses, because they have married some stick of a husband whose marital modesty has allowed them to spend their lives in total ignorance of refined and delicate sentiment.

Then I began to tell her anecdotes, stories of little private dinners, of intrigues which I claimed were known the world over. The refrain was always the same, it was always discreet, veiled praise of sudden and secret love, of the sensation stolen like a fruit, while passing by, and forgotten as soon as it is over.

Night came on, calm and warm. The great vessel, vibrating under the impulse of its machinery, was gliding over the seas, beneath the immense arch of the violet sky studded with stars.

The little woman was silent. She was breathing slowly and sometimes sighing. Suddenly she arose:

"I am going to bed," she said; "good night, monsieur."

She shook hands with me.

I knew that she expected the following evening

to take the coach which goes from Bastia to Ajaccio through the mountains, travelling all night.

I answered:

"Good night, madame."

I then went to my cabin.

The next morning, early, I reserved all three seats in the coach for myself, alone.

At nightfall, as I was climbing into the old wagon which was about to leave Bastia, the driver asked me if I would be willing to give up one seat to a lady. I asked gruffly:

"To what lady?"

"To an officer's wife who is going to Ajaccio."

"Tell this person that I will willingly give her a seat."

She arrived, having spent the day sleeping, she said. She excused herself, thanked me and climbed in.

This wagon was a kind of hermetically sealed box, getting no light except through its two doors. There we were, face to face in the interior. The horses went at a lively trot; then we got into the mountains. A fresh and penetrating odor of aromatic herbs drifted in through the open windows, that strong fragrance which Corsica spreads around itself to such a distance that the sailors can recognize it at sea, so subtle that it cannot be analyzed. I started once more to speak of Paris, and she listened to me again with feverish attention. My stories became bolder and full of those veiled double-ententes which stir the blood.

Night had fallen completely. I could no longer see anything, not even the white spot which, a minute ago, the young woman's face made in the

darkness. The driver's lantern, alone, lighted the four horses, which were slowly climbing the ascent.

From time to time the sound of a mountain torrent, rushing through the rocks, came to us mingled with the noise of the bells on the horses, then it was soon lost in the distance behind us.

Slowly I advanced my foot and met hers, which she did not remove. Then I kept still, I was waiting, and suddenly I began to talk of tenderness, of affection. I had put out my hand and met hers. She did not remove that either. I kept on talking, nearer to her ear, very close to her mouth. I already felt her heart beating against my breast. It was beating fast and strong—good sign; then, slowly, I placed my lips on her neck, sure that I held her, so sure that I would have staked my life on it.

But, suddenly, she gave a start, as though she had just waked up, such a start that I flew over to the other side of the carriage. Then, before I had had time to understand, to think, to reflect, I received first five or six terrible slaps in the face, and then a shower of blows from her clenched fist, which came hard and heavy, hitting me everywhere, without my being able to ward them off in the dense darkness by which we were surrounded.

I stretched out my hands, trying vainly to seize her arms. Then, no longer knowing what to do, I turned round quickly, presenting to her furious attack only my back, and hiding my head in a corner of the cushioned seat.

She seemed to understand, perhaps by the sound of the blows, this ruse of a desperate man, and she stopped hitting me.

After a few minutes she went back to her corner, and kept sobbing as though her heart would break for at least an hour.

I sat down again, very uneasy and ashamed. I would have liked to talk to her, but what could I say? I could think of nothing! Make excuses? That would be stupid! What would you have said? Nothing, you may be sure.

She was heaving great sighs now, which affected me and distressed me. I would have liked to console her, to kiss her, as one kisses a sorrowing child, to beg her pardon, to throw myself at her feet, but I did not dare.

Those situations are very embarrassing!

At last she became calmer, and each of us remained in his corner, motionless and speechless, while the carriage kept on, stopping from time to time for new relays. Then we would both quickly close our eyes so as not to see each other when the bright rays of a stable lantern penetrated our Stygian darkness. Then the coach would start again, and the sweet-perfumed air of the Corsican mountains caressing my cheeks and lips intoxicated me like wine.

By Jove! what a wonderful trip it would have been if my companion had not been so foolish.

Slowly daylight began to creep into the carriage, the pale light of early dawn. I looked at my neighbor. She was pretending to sleep. Then the sun, rising behind the mountains, soon covered with light an immense blue gulf, surrounded by enormous granite-capped peaks. On the edge of this gulf a white town, still in shadow became visible.

My neighbor then pretended to awake. She opened

her eyes (they were red); she opened her mouth as though to yawn, just as though she had slept for a long time. Then she hesitated, blushed and stammered:

"Shall we soon be there?"

"Yes, madame, in less than an hour."

She continued, looking out in the distance:

"It's very tiresome to spend the night in a coach."

"Yes, it makes one quite lame."

"Especially after a trip on the water."

"Oh! yes."

"Is that Ajaccio ahead of us?"

"Yes, madame."

"I wish we were there."

"I can understand that."

The sound of her voice was a little troubled, her manner a little embarrassed, her eye avoided mine. However, she seemed to have forgotten everything.

I admired her. How instinctively artful those little minxes are! What diplomats!

After about an hour we arrived; and a big dragoon, built like a Hercules, standing outside the coach office, waved his handkerchief on discovering the carriage.

My neighbor threw her arms round his neck and kissed him at least twenty times, repeating:

"How are you, honey? I was *so* anxious to see you!"

My trunk had been taken from the top of the coach, and I was discreetly retreating when she called me back:

"Oh, monsieur, are you leaving without saying good-by to me?"

I stammered: "Madame, I was leaving you to your joy."

Then she said to her husband: "Darling, thank monsieur; he was charming to me throughout the whole trip. He even offered me a seat in the carriage, which he had reserved for himself. It is a pleasure to meet such agreeable companions."

The husband shook my hand, thanking me effusively.

The young woman smiled as she watched us together—I must have looked like a fool!

# FOR SALE

WHAT a pleasure it is to go for a walk just as the sun is rising, to drift along through the dewy fields, along by the seashore! What bliss! The sweet light kissing your eyes, the delicately perfumed air entering your nostrils and bathing your whole body in a gentle breeze.

Why do we retain such a sweet remembrance of certain precious minutes spent in communing with Mother Earth—the recollection of receiving a sweet sensation as of a delicate caress imprinted on one's memory at the sight of a picturesque bit of scenery, as though one had been permitted to catch a glimpse of some lovely nymph?

I remember one day when I was tramping along the Brittany coast, toward Cape Finistère. I was wandering along aimlessly near Quimperlé, in the most picturesque part of beautiful Brittany. It was one of those spring mornings which make one younger by twenty years, which gives one the hopes and dreams of youth.

I was following a path along the sea, by the wheat fields. The fields were still and the water was as quiet as a mill pond. The sweet odor of the sea and of ripening crops was everywhere. I was following my fancy along the coast, in a journey which had begun two weeks before. I felt strong, nimble, happy and free from care.

My thoughts were nowhere! Why should one think in those hours of unconscious joy, the joy of an animal running in the grass, or of a bird flying through the blue skies? In the distance I could hear the sound of singing voices. As it was Sunday, I thought it might perhaps be a religious procession, but as I turned a sharp bend in the path I stood motionless, spellbound. Five large fishing smacks appeared before me filled with men, women and children, who were going to high mass at Plouneven. They were drifting along the coast, gently propelled by a soft breeze which just filled the sails. Those heavy vessels were gliding along gently, loaded with passengers, and all those people were singing. The deep voices of the men standing by the rails, in their large hats, mingled with the shriller voices of the women and the high, flute-like notes of the children. The passengers of the five boats were chanting the same hymn, whose monotonous rhythm travelled clearly through the calm air. The five boats were sailing one behind the other, very close together. They passed in front of me, close to me, and as they disappeared I heard the singing grow fainter and fainter.

I gave my imagination the rein as one does in youth and in as puerile and enchanting a manner How quickly this age of dreams disappears, the happiest time of our life! We are never lonely or sad, never morose or disappointed when we have within ourselves the divine faculty of being able to lose ourselves in fond hopes as soon as we are alone. What a fairyland is the land where everything is possible in our flights of fancy! How beautiful is life in the golden light of dreams!

Alas! all that is over now!

I began to dream. What of? Of everything that one is expecting, of everything for which one is hoping, of fortune, of glory, of woman.

I was walking along quickly, running my hand across through the golden wheat ears which bent under my fingers and tickled my skin. As I turned round a little headland, I noticed, at the bottom of a narrow crescent-shaped beach, a white house, built on three terraces which descended to the sand.

Why did the sight of this house make me start with joy? How should I know? Sometimes in wandering about in this manner we see little nooks which we seem to have known for years, they look so familiar and give you a sense of contentment. May we not have lived there in years gone by? Everything is alluring, tempting, the faint line of the horizon, the position of the trees, the golden sand.

How pretty the house looked above its high terraces, which sloped down to the water like a giants' stairway, each one having on its ridge a row of shrubs of Spanish broom in flower, while all along them great fruit trees were growing.

I stopped, in love with the little house, overwhelmed with a desire to gain possession of it and live there forever!

Going up to the door, my pulse quickened as I noticed on the gate-post a large sign, "For Sale."

I felt a thrill of pleasure, as though this house had been offered to me, given to me. Why? I know not.

"For Sale." Then it scarcely belonged to any one; it might belong to anybody, to me, to me! Why

this unaccountable sensation of deep joy? I knew that I was not going to buy it! How could I pay for it? But it was for sale! The bird in the cage belongs to his master; the bird in the air belongs to me, being the property of no one else.

I went into the garden. What an alluring garden, with its espalier fruit trees with their long branches like the arms of crucified martyrs, its tufts of golden ginesta, and the two old fig trees at the end of each terrace. When I reached the last one, I turned round and looked across the sea. The little beach stretched at my feet, curved and sandy; it was cut off from the open sea by three large massive rocks, which closed the entrance to it, and acted as a breakwater as the waves rolled in from the sea on a stormy day.

On the opposite promontory two enormous stones, one standing, the other lying in the grass, a *menhir* and a *dolmen,* seemed to keep watch over the little house which they had seen built. For centuries they had known this little bay, once deserted; they would still be there when the little house crumbled and disappeared.

Oh, emblems of times gone by, how I love you!

I rang the bell as though I had been at home. A kindly looking little old woman, with a white cap on, and clad in a black dress, opened the door for me. It seemed as though I had always known her.

I said: "You are not from Brittany yourself, are you?"

She answered: "No, sir, I am from Lorraine." Then she added: "Have you come to visit the house?"

"That's what I should like to do."

I entered. I seemed to recognize everything—the walls, the furniture. I was even surprised not to see my canes standing near the door. I went into the parlor, a pretty little room covered with straw matting, and with three large windows looking out over the sea. On the mantelpiece stood a couple of vases and a large photograph of a woman. I immediately went toward it, persuaded that I would recognize that also. And I did, although I was certain that I had never met her. It was she, the one for whom I had waited, whom I desired, for whom I called, whose face haunted my dreams. It was she, the one we are always seeking everywhere, the one whom we expect to see in the street or on the country road as soon as we see a red parasol amid the wheat fields, the one whom we expect to find in the hotel when we are travelling or on the train which we are about to take, or in the parlor when the door opens before us.

It was she, undoubtedly she! I recognized her eyes, which were looking into mine, her soft wavy hair, and her mouth especially, with its sweet smile of which I had so often dreamed.

I immediately asked: "Who is this woman?"

The old lady answered drily: "It is madame."

"Your mistress?" I asked.

She answered in her quiet manner: "Oh, no, sir."

Taking a chair, I sat down and said: "Tell me about it."

She stood motionless, surprised, silent.

I insisted: "Is she the owner of the house?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, to whom *does* the house belong?"

"To my master, Monsieur Tournelle."

Pointing to the photograph, I asked:

"Who is that woman?"

"That is madame."

"Monsieur's wife?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"His sweetheart then?"

Getting no answer, and torn by a queer kind of jealousy, of confused anger against the man who had found this woman, I asked:

"Where are they now?"

She murmured: "Monsieur is in Paris, but as for madame—I don't know where *she* is."

I started: "Then they are no longer together?"

"No, sir."

I was crafty, and in a solemn voice I said: "Tell me what has happened; I may perhaps be able to be of some service to your master. I know that woman; she is a bad lot."

The old servant looked at me, and encouraged by my open and frank appearance, she confided in me:

"Oh! she made my master so unhappy. He met her in Italy and brought her back with him. She was a beautiful singer. It was pitiful to see the way monsieur loved her. They were travelling in this neighborhood last year, when they saw this house, which had been built by a crazy man who wanted to be at least two leagues away from the village. Madame wanted to buy it immediately and to stay in it with my master. He bought the house to please her. They lived here all last summer and most of the winter. One morning, just before breakfast,

monsieur called me: 'Césarine, has madame returned?'

" 'No, sir.'

"We waited for her all day. He was raving. We searched for her everywhere, but she was not to be found. She had disappeared, no one knows where or how."

Oh, what joy filled me! I could have kissed the old woman. I felt like taking her in my arms and dancing round the parlor.

So she had gone, she had fled, she had left, tired of this man and disgusted with him! How happy I felt!

The old lady continued: "Monsieur became despondent, and he went back to Paris, leaving me here with my husband to sell the house. The price is twenty thousand francs."

But I was no longer listening! I was thinking of her! And suddenly it seemed as though I need only start out again in order to find her. She must have come back to the neighborhood, this spring, to see the house, her dear little house, which she would have loved so dearly, without him.

I dropped ten francs into the old servant's hand, seized the photograph and ran away, fondly kissing the dear cardboard image. I reached the road and started to walk with my eyes fixed on *her*. What luck that she should be free, that she should have left him! I would surely meet her to-day or to-morrow, this week or the next, since she had left him! She had left him because *my* time had come! She was somewhere in this world! I needed only to find her, since I already knew her.

And once more running my hands across the nod-

ding heads of ripe wheat, I drank in the sea air and felt the sun kiss my cheeks. I went on and on, bewildered with joy, intoxicated with hope. I went on, sure that I would soon meet her and bring her back once more to live in the pretty little house *"For Sale."* How happy she would be this time!

# THE RABBIT

OLD Lecacheur appeared at the door of his house between five and a quarter past five in the morning, his usual hour, to watch his men going to work.

He was only half awake, his face was red, and with his right eye open and the left nearly closed, he was buttoning his braces over his fat stomach with some difficulty, at the same time looking into every corner of the farmyard with a searching glance. The sun darted its oblique rays through the beech trees by the side of the ditch and athwart the apple trees outside, and was making the cocks crow on the dunghill, and the pigeons coo on the roof. The smell of the cow stable came through the open door, and blended in the fresh morning air with the pungent odor of the stable, where the horses were neighing, with their heads turned toward the light.

As soon as his trousers were properly fastened, Lecacheur came out, and went, first of all, toward the hen house to count the morning's eggs, for he had been afraid of thefts for some time; but the servant girl ran up to him with lifted arms and cried:

"Master! master! they have stolen a rabbit during the night."

"A rabbit?"

"Yes, master, the big gray rabbit, from the hutch on the left"; whereupon the farmer completely opened his left eye, and said, simply:

"I must see about that."

And off he went to inspect it. The hutch had been broken open and the rabbit was gone. Then he became thoughtful, closed his right eye again, and scratched his nose, and after a little consideration, he said to the frightened girl, who was standing stupidly before her master:

"Go and fetch the gendarmes; say I expect them as soon as possible."

Lecacheur was mayor of the village, Pavigny-le-Gras, and ruled it like a master, on account of his money and position, and as soon as the servant had disappeared in the direction of the village, which was only about five hundred yards off, he went into the house to have his morning coffee and to discuss the matter with his wife, whom he found on her knees in front of the fire, trying to make it burn quickly, and as soon as he got to the door, he said:

"Somebody has stolen the gray rabbit."

She turned round so suddenly that she found herself sitting on the floor, and looking at her husband with distressed eyes, she said:

"What is it, Cacheux? Somebody has stolen a rabbit?"

"The big gray one."

She sighed.

"What a shame! Who can have done it?"

She was a little, thin, active, neat woman, who knew all about farming. Lecacheur had his own ideas about the matter.

"It must be that fellow, Polyte."

His wife got up suddenly and said in a furious voice:

"He did it! he did it! You need not look for any one else. He did it! You have said it, Cacheux!"

All her peasant's fury, all her avarice, all her rage of a saving woman against the man of whom she had always been suspicious, and against the girl whom she had always suspected, showed themselves in the contraction of her mouth, and the wrinkles in the cheeks and forehead of her thin, exasperated face.

"And what have you done?" she asked.

"I have sent for the gendarmes."

This Polyte was a laborer, who had been employed on the farm for a few days, and who had been dismissed by Lecacheur for an insolent answer. He was an old soldier, and was supposed to have retained his habits of marauding and debauchery from his campaigns in Africa. He did anything for a livelihood, but whether he were a mason, a navvy, a reaper, whether he broke stones or lopped trees, he was always lazy, and so he remained nowhere for long, and had, at times, to change his neighborhood to obtain work.

From the first day that he came to the farm, Lecacheur's wife had detested him, and now she was sure that he had committed the theft.

In about half an hour the two gendarmes arrived. Brigadier Sénateur was very tall and thin, and Gendarme Lenient short and fat. Lecacheur made them sit down, and told them the affair, and then they went and saw the scene of the theft, in order to verify the fact that the hutch had been broken

open, and to collect all the proofs they could. When they got back to the kitchen, the mistress brought in some wine, filled their glasses, and asked with a distrustful look:

"Shall you catch him?"

The brigadier, who had his sword between his legs, appeared thoughtful. Certainly, he was sure of taking him, if he was pointed out to him, but if not, he could not answer for being able to discover him, himself, and after reflecting for a long time, he put this simple question:

"Do you know the thief?"

And Lecacheur replied, with a look of Normandy slyness in his eyes:

"As for knowing him, I do not, as I did not see him commit the theft. If I had seen him, I should have made him eat it raw, skin and flesh, without a drop of cider to wash it down. But as for saying who it is, I cannot, although I believe it is that good-for-nothing Polyte."

Then he related at length his troubles with Polyte, his leaving his service, his bad reputation, things which had been told him, accumulating insignificant and minute proofs, and then, the brigadier, who had been listening very attentively while he emptied his glass and filled it again with an indifferent air, turned to his gendarme and said:

"We must go and look in the cottage of Severin's wife." At which the gendarme smiled and nodded three times.

Then Madame Lecacheur came to them, and very quietly, with all a peasant's cunning, questioned the brigadier in her turn. That shepherd Severin, a simpleton, a sort of brute who had been brought up and

had grown up among his bleating flocks, and who knew scarcely anything besides them in the world, had nevertheless preserved the peasant's instinct for saving, at the bottom of his heart. For years and years he must have hidden in hollow trees and crevices in the rocks all that he earned, either as a shepherd or by curing animals' sprains—for the bone-setter's secret had been handed down to him by the old shepherd whose place he took—by touch or word, and one day he bought a small property, consisting of a cottage and a field, for three thousand francs.

A few months later it became known that he was going to marry a servant, notorious for her bad morals, the innkeeper's servant. The young fellows said that the girl, knowing that he was pretty well off, had been to his cottage every night, and had taken him, captured him, led him on to matrimony, little by little, night by night.

And then, having been to the mayor's office and to church, she now lived in the house which her man had bought, while he continued to tend his flocks, day and night, on the plains.

And the brigadier added:

"Polyte has been sleeping there for three weeks, for the thief has no place of his own to go to!"

The gendarme made a little joke:

"He takes the shepherd's blankets."

Madame Lecacheur, who was seized by a fresh access of rage, of rage increased by a married woman's anger against debauchery, exclaimed:

"It is she, I am sure. Go there. Ah, the blackguard thieves!"

But the brigadier was quite unmoved.

"One minute," he said. "Let us wait until twelve o'clock, as he goes and dines there every day. I shall catch them with it under their noses."

The gendarme smiled, pleased at his chief's idea, and Lecacheur also smiled now, for the affair of the shepherd struck him as very funny; deceived husbands are always a joke.

* * * * * * * *

Twelve o'clock had just struck when the brigadier, followed by his man, knocked gently three times at the door of a little lonely house, situated at the corner of a wood, five hundred yards from the village.

They had been standing close against the wall, so as not to be seen from within, and they waited. As nobody answered, the brigadier knocked again in a minute or two. It was so quiet that the house seemed uninhabited; but Lenient, the gendarme, who had very quick ears, said that he heard somebody moving about inside, and then Sénateur got angry. He would not allow any one to resist the authority of the law for a moment, and, knocking at the door with the hilt of his sword, he cried out:

"Open the door, in the name of the law."

As this order had no effect, he roared out:

"If you do not obey, I shall smash the lock. I am the brigadier of the gendarmerie, by G——! Here, Lenient."

He had not finished speaking when the door opened and Sénateur saw before him a fat girl, with a very red, blowzy face, with drooping breasts, a big stomach and broad hips, a sort of animal, the wife of the shepherd Severin, and he went into the cottage.

"I have come to pay you a visit, as I want to make a little search," he said, and he looked about him. On the table there was a plate, a jug of cider and a glass half full, which proved that a meal was in progress. Two knives were lying side by side, and the shrewd gendarme winked at his superior officer.

"It smells good," the latter said.

"One might swear that it was stewed rabbit," Lenient added, much amused.

"Will you have a glass of brandy?" the peasant woman asked.

"No, thank you; I only want the skin of the rabbit that you are eating."

She pretended not to understand, but she was trembling.

"What rabbit?"

The brigadier had taken a seat, and was calmly wiping his forehead.

"Come, come, you are not going to try and make us believe that you live on couch grass. What were you eating there all by yourself for your dinner?"

"I? Nothing whatever, I swear to you. A mite of butter on my bread."

"You are a novice, my good woman. *A mite of butter on your bread.* You are mistaken; you ought to have said: a mite of butter on the rabbit. By G——, your butter smells good! It is special butter, extra good butter, butter fit for a wedding; certainly, not household butter!"

The gendarme was shaking with laughter, and repeated:

"Not household butter certainly."

As Brigadier Sénateur was a joker, all the gen-

darmes had grown facetious, and the officer continued:

"Where is your butter?"

"My butter?"

"Yes, your butter."

"In the jar."

"Then where is the butter jar?"

"Here it is."

She brought out an old cup, at the bottom of which there was a layer of rancid salt butter, and the brigadier smelled of it, and said, with a shake of his head:

"It is not the same. I want the butter that smells of the rabbit. Come, Lenient, open your eyes; look under the sideboard, my good fellow, and I will look under the bed."

Having shut the door, he went up to the bed and tried to move it; but it was fixed to the wall, and had not been moved for more than half a century, apparently. Then the brigadier stooped, and made his uniform crack. A button had flown off.

"Lenient," he said.

"Yes, brigadier?"

"Come here, my lad, and look under the bed; I am too tall. I will look after the sideboard."

He got up and waited while his man executed his orders.

Lenient, who was short and stout, took off his képi, laid himself on his stomach, and, putting his face on the floor, looked at the black cavity under the bed, and then, suddenly, he exclaimed:

"All right, here we are!"

"What have you got? The rabbit?"

"No, the thief."

"The thief! Pull him out, pull him out!"

The gendarme had put his arms under the bed and laid hold of something, and he was pulling with all his might, and at last a foot, shod in a thick boot, appeared, which he was holding in his right hand. The brigadier took it, crying:

"Pull! Pull!"

And Lenient, who was on his knees by that time, was pulling at the other leg. But it was a hard job, for the prisoner kicked out hard, and arched up his back under the bed.

"Courage! courage! pull! pull!" Sénateur cried, and they pulled him with all their strength, so that the wooden slat gave way, and he came out as far as his head; but at last they got that out also, and they saw the terrified and furious face of Polyte, whose arms remained stretched out under the bed.

"Pull away!" the brigadier kept on exclaiming. Then they heard a strange noise, and as the arms followed the shoulders, and the hands the arms, they saw in the hands the handle of a saucepan, and at the end of the handle the saucepan itself, which contained stewed rabbit.

"Good Lord! good Lord!" the brigadier shouted in his delight, while Lenient took charge of the man; the rabbit's skin, an overwhelming proof, was discovered under the mattress, and then the gendarmes returned in triumph to the village with their prisoner and their booty.

A week later, as the affair had made much stir, Lecacheur, on going into the mairie to consult the schoolmaster, was told that the shepherd Severin had been waiting for him for more than an hour,

and he found him sitting on a chair in a corner, with his stick between his legs. When he saw the mayor, he got up, took off his cap, and said:

"Good-morning, Maître Cacheux"; and then he remained standing, timid and embarrassed.

"What do you want?" the former said.

"This is it, monsieur. Is it true that somebody stole one of your rabbits last week?"

"Yes, it is quite true, Severin."

"Who stole the rabbit?"

"Polyte Ancas, the laborer."

"Right! right! And is it also true that it was found under my bed?"

"What do you mean, the rabbit?"

"The rabbit and then Polyte."

"Yes, my poor Severin, quite true, but who told you?"

"Pretty well everybody. I understand! And I suppose you know all about marriages, as you marry people?"

"What about marriage?"

"With regard to one's rights."

"What rights?"

"The husband's rights and then the wife's rights."

"Of course I do."

"Oh! Then just tell me, M'sieu Cacheux, has my wife the right to go to bed with Polyte?"

"What, to go to bed with Polyte?"

"Yes, has she any right before the law, and, seeing that she is my wife, to go to bed with Polyte?"

"Why, of course not, of course not."

"If I catch him there again, shall I have the right to thrash him and her also?"

"Why—why—why, yes."

"Very well, then; I will tell you why I want to know. One night last week, as I had my suspicions, I came in suddenly, and they were not behaving properly. I chucked Polyte out, to go and sleep somewhere else; but that was all, as I did not know what my rights were. This time I did not see them; I only heard of it from others. That is over, and we will not say any more about it; but if I catch them again—by G——, if I catch them again, I will make them lose all taste for such nonsense, Maître Cacheux, as sure as my name is Severin."

# THE MORIBUND

THE warm autumn sun was beating down on the farmyard. Under the grass, which had been cropped close by the cows, the earth, soaked by recent rains, was soft and sank in under the feet with a soggy noise, and the apple trees, loaded with apples, were dropping their pale green fruit in the dark green grass.

Four young heifers, tied in a line, were grazing and at times looking toward the house and lowing. The fowls made a colored patch on the dung-heap before the stable, scratching, moving about and cackling, while two roosters crowed continually, digging worms for their hens, whom they were calling with a loud clucking.

The wooden gate opened and a man entered. He might have been forty years old, but he looked at least sixty, wrinkled, bent, walking slowly, impeded by the weight of heavy wooden shoes full of straw. His long arms hung down on both sides of his body. When he got near the farm a yellow cur, tied at the foot of an enormous pear tree, beside a barrel which served as his kennel, began at first to wag his tail and then to bark for joy. The man cried:

"Down, Finot!"

The dog was quiet.

A peasant woman came out of the house. Her large, flat, bony body was outlined under a long

woollen jacket drawn in at the waist. A gray skirt, too short, fell to the middle of her legs, which were encased in blue stockings. She, too, wore wooden shoes, filled with straw. The white cap, turned yellow, covered a few hairs which were plastered to the scalp, and her brown, thin, ugly, toothless face had that wild, animal expression which is often to be found on the faces of the peasants.

The man asked:

"How is he gettin' along?"

The woman answered:

"The priest said it's the end—that he will never live through the night."

Both of them went into the house.

After passing through the kitchen, they entered a low, dark room, barely lighted by one window, in front of which a piece of calico was hanging. The big beams, turned brown with age and smoke, crossed the room from one side to the other, supporting the thin floor of the garret, where an army of rats ran about day and night.

The moist, lumpy earthen floor looked greasy, and, at the back of the room, the bed made an indistinct white spot. A harsh, regular noise, a difficult, hoarse, wheezing breathing, like the gurgling of water from a broken pump, came from the darkened couch where an old man, the father of the peasant woman, was dying.

The man and the woman approached the dying man and looked at him with calm, resigned eyes.

The son-in-law said:

"I guess it's all up with him this time; he will not last the night."

The woman answered:

"He's been gurglin' like that ever since midday."

They were silent. The father's eyes were closed, his face was the color of the earth and so dry that it looked like wood. Through his open mouth came his harsh, rattling breath, and the gray linen sheet rose and fell with each respiration.

The son-in-law, after a long silence, said:

"There's nothing more to do; I can't help him. It's a nuisance, just the same, because the weather is good and we've got a lot of work to do."

His wife seemed annoyed at this idea. She reflected a few moments and then said:

"He won't be buried till Saturday, and that will give you all day to-morrow."

The peasant thought the matter over and answered:

"Yes, but to-morrow I'll have to invite the people to the funeral. That means five or six hours to go round to Tourville and Manetot, and to see everybody."

The woman, after meditating two or three minutes, declared:

"It isn't three o'clock yet. You could begin this evening and go all round the country to Tourville. You can just as well say that he's dead, seein' as he's as good as that now."

The man stood perplexed for a while, weighing the pros and cons of the idea. At last he declared:

"Well, I'll go!"

He was leaving the room, but came back after a minute's hesitation:

"As you haven't got anythin' to do, you might shake down some apples to bake and make four dozen dumplings for those who come to the funeral, for

one must have something to cheer them. You can light the fire with the wood that's under the shed. It's dry."

He left the room, went back into the kitchen, opened the cupboard, took out a six-pound loaf of bread, cut off a slice, and carefully gathered the crumbs in the palm of his hand and threw them into his mouth, so as not to lose anything. Then, with the end of his knife, he scraped out a little salt butter from the bottom of an earthen jar, spread it on his bread and began to eat slowly, as he did everything.

He recrossed the farmyard, quieted the dog, which had started barking again, went out on the road bordering on his ditch, and disappeared in the direction of Tourville.

As soon as she was alone, the woman began to work. She uncovered the meal-bin and made the dough for the dumplings. She kneaded it a long time, turning it over and over again, punching, pressing, crushing it. Finally she made a big, round, yellow-white ball, which she placed on the corner of the table.

Then she went to get her apples, and, in order not to injure the tree with a pole, she climbed up into it by a ladder. She chose the fruit with care, only taking the ripe ones, and gathering them in her apron.

A voice called from the road:

"Hey, Madame Chicot!"

She turned round. It was a neighbor, Osime Favet, the mayor, on his way to fertilize his fields, seated on the manure-wagon, with his feet hanging over the side. She turned round and answered:

"What can I do for you, Maître Osime?"

"And how is the father?"

She cried:

"He is as good as dead. The funeral is Saturday at seven, because there's lots of work to be done."

The neighbor answered:

"So! Good luck to you! Take care of yourself."

To his kind remarks she answered:

"Thanks; the same to you."

And she continued picking apples.

When she went back to the house, she went over to look at her father, expecting to find him dead. But as soon as she reached the door she heard his monotonous, noisy rattle, and, thinking it a waste of time to go over to him, she began to prepare her dumplings. She wrapped up the fruit, one by one, in a thin layer of paste, then she lined them up on the edge of the table. When she had made forty-eight dumplings, arranged in dozens, one in front of the other, she began to think of preparing supper, and she hung her kettle over the fire to cook potatoes, for she judged it useless to heat the oven that day, as she had all the next day in which to finish the preparations.

Her husband returned at about five. As soon as he had crossed the threshold he asked:

"Is it over?"

She answered:

"Not yet; he's still gurglin'."

They went to look at him. The old man was in exactly the same condition. His hoarse rattle, as regular as the ticking of a clock, was neither quicker nor slower. It returned every second, the

tone varying a little, according as the air entered or left his chest.

His son-in-law looked at him and then said:

"He'll pass away without our noticin' it, just like a candle."

They returned to the kitchen and started to eat without saying a word. When they had swallowed their soup, they ate another piece of bread and butter. Then, as soon as the dishes were washed, they returned to the dying man.

The woman, carrying a little lamp with a smoky wick, held it in front of her father's face. If he had not been breathing, one would certainly have thought him dead.

The couple's bed was hidden in a little recess at the other end of the room. Silently they retired, put out the light, closed their eyes, and soon two unequal snores, one deep and the other shriller, accompanied the uninterrupted rattle of the dying man.

The rats ran about in the garret.

The husband awoke at the first streaks of dawn. His father-in-law was still alive. He shook his wife, worried by the tenacity of the old man.

"Say, Phémie, he don't want to quit. What would you do?"

He knew that she gave good advice.

She answered:

"You needn't be afraid; he can't live through the day. And the mayor won't stop our burying him to-morrow, because he allowed it for Maitre Renard's father, who died just during the planting season."

He was convinced by this argument, and left for the fields.

His wife baked the dumplings and then attended to her housework.

At noon the old man was not dead. The people hired for the day's work came by groups to look at him. Each one had his say. Then they left again for the fields.

At six o'clock, when the work was over, the father was still breathing. At last his son-in-law was frightened.

"What would you do now, Phémie?"

She no longer knew how to solve the problem. They went to the mayor. He promised that he would close his eyes and authorize the funeral for the following day. They also went to the health officer, who likewise promised, in order to oblige Maître Chicot, to antedate the death certificate. The man and the woman returned, feeling more at ease.

They went to bed and to sleep, just as they did the preceding day, their sonorous breathing blending with the feeble breathing of the old man.

When they awoke, he was not yet dead.

Then they began to be frightened. They stood by their father, watching him with distrust, as though he had wished to play them a mean trick, to deceive them, to annoy them on purpose, and they were vexed at him for the time which he was making them lose.

The son-in-law asked:

"What am I goin' to do?"

She did not know. She answered:

"It certainly is annoying!"

The guests who were expected could not be noti-

fied. They decided to wait and explain the case to them.

Toward a quarter to seven the first ones arrived. The women in black, their heads covered with large veils, looking very sad. Then men, ill at ease in their homespun coats, were coming forward more slowly, in couples, talking business.

Maître Chicot and his wife, bewildered, received them sorrowfully, and suddenly both of them together began to cry as they approached the first group. They explained the matter, related their difficulty, offered chairs, bustled about, tried to make excuses, attempting to prove that everybody would have done as they did, talking continually and giving nobody a chance to answer.

They were going from one person to another:

"I never would have thought it; it's incredible how he can last this long!"

The guests, taken aback, a little disappointed, as though they had missed an expected entertainment, did not know what to do, some remaining seated, others standing. Several wished to leave. Maître Chicot held them back:

"You must take something, anyhow! We made some dumplings; might as well make use of 'em."

The faces brightened at this idea. The yard was filling little by little; the early arrivals were telling the news to those who had arrived later. Everybody was whispering. The idea of the dumplings seemed to cheer everyone up.

The women went in to take a look at the dying man. They crossed themselves beside the bed, muttered a prayer and went out again. The men, less

anxious for this spectacle, cast a look through the window, which had been opened.

Madame Chicot explained her distress:

"That's how he's been for two days, neither better nor worse. Doesn't he sound like a pump that has gone dry?"

When everybody had had a look at the dying man, they thought of the refreshments; but as there were too many people for the kitchen to hold, the table was moved out in front of the door. The four dozen golden dumplings, tempting and appetizing, arranged in two big dishes, attracted the eyes of all. Each one reached out to take his, fearing that there would not be enough. But four remained over.

Maître Chicot, his mouth full, said:

"Father would feel sad if he were to see this. He loved them so much when he was alive."

A big, jovial peasant declared:

"He won't eat any more now. Each one in his turn."

This remark, instead of making the guests sad, seemed to cheer them up. It was their turn now to eat dumplings.

Madame Chicot, distressed at the expense, kept running down to the cellar continually for cider. The pitchers were emptied in quick succession. The company was laughing and talking loud now. They were beginning to shout as they do at feasts.

Suddenly an old peasant woman who had stayed beside the dying man, held there by a morbid fear of what would soon happen to herself, appeared at the window and cried in a shrill voice:

"He's dead! he's dead!"

Everybody was silent. The women arose quickly to go and see.

He was indeed dead. The rattle had ceased. The men looked at each other, looking down, ill at ease. They hadn't finished eating the dumplings. Certainly the rascal had not chosen a propitious moment.

The Chicots were no longer weeping. It was over; they were relieved. They kept repeating:

"I knew it couldn't last. If he could only have done it last night, it would have saved us all this trouble."

Well, anyhow, it was over. They would bury him on Monday, that was all, and they would eat some more dumplings for the occasion.

The guests went away, talking the matter over, pleased at having had the chance to see him and of getting something to eat.

And when the husband and wife were alone, face to face, she said, her face distorted with grief:

"We'll have to bake four dozen more dumplings! Why couldn't he have made up his mind last night?"

The husband, more resigned, answered:

"Well, we'll not have to do this every day."

# THE BARONESS

"COME with me," said my friend Boisrené, "you will see some very interesting bric-à-brac and works of art there."

He conducted me to the first floor of an elegant house in one of the big streets of Paris. We were welcomed by a very pleasing man, with excellent manners, who led us from room to room, showing us rare things, the price of which he mentioned carelessly. Large sums, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty thousand francs, dropped from his lips with such grace and ease that one could not doubt that this gentleman-merchant had millions shut up in his safe.

I had known him by reputation for a long time. Very bright, clever, intelligent, he acted as intermediary in all sorts of transactions. He kept in touch with all the richest art amateurs in Paris, and even of Europe and America, knowing their tastes and preferences; he apprised them by letter, or by wire if they lived in a distant city, as soon as he knew of some work of art which might suit them.

Men of the best society had had recourse to him in times of difficulty, either to find money for gambling, or to pay off a debt, or to sell a picture, a family jewel, or a tapestry.

It was said that he never refused his services when he saw a chance of gain.

Boisrené seemed very intimate with this strange

merchant. They must have worked together in many a deal. I observed the man with great interest.

He was tall, thin, bald, and very elegant. His soft, insinuating voice had a peculiar, tempting charm which seemed to give the objects a special value. When he held anything in his hands, he turned it round and round, looking at it with such skill, refinement, and sympathy that the object seemed immediately to be beautiful and transformed by his look and touch. And its value increased in one's estimation, after the object had passed from the showcase into his hands.

"And your Crucifix," said Boisrené, "that beautiful Renaissance Crucifix which you showed me last year?"

The man smiled and answered:

"It has been sold, and in a very peculiar manner. There is a real Parisian story for you! Would you like to hear it?"

"With pleasure."

"Do you know the Baroness Samoris?"

"Yes and no. I have seen her once, but I know what she is!"

"You know—everything?"

"Yes."

"Would you mind telling me, so that I can see whether you are not mistaken?"

"Certainly. Mme. Samoris is a woman of the world who has a daughter, without anyone having known her husband. At any rate, she is received in a certain tolerant, or blind society. She goes to church and devoutly partakes of Communion, so that everyone may know it, and she never compro-

mises herself. She expects her daughter to marry well. Is that correct?"

"Yes, but I will complete your information. She is a woman who makes herself respected by her admirers in spite of everything. That is a rare quality, for in this manner she can get what she wishes from a man. The man whom she has chosen without his suspecting it courts her for a long time, longs for her timidly, wins her with astonishment and possesses her with consideration. He does not notice that he is paying, she is so tactful; and she maintains her relations on such a footing of reserve and dignity that he would slap the first man who dared doubt her in the least. And all this in the best of faith.

"Several times I have been able to render little services to this woman. She has no secrets from me.

"Toward the beginning of January she came to me in order to borrow thirty thousand francs. Naturally, I did not lend them to her; but, as I wished to oblige her, I told her to explain her situation to me completely, so that I might see whether there was not something I could do for her.

"She told me her troubles in such cautious language that she could not have spoken more delicately of her child's first communion. I finally managed to understand that times were hard, and that she was penniless.

"The commercial crisis, political unrest, rumors of war, had made money scarce even in the hands of her clients. And then, of course, she was very particular.

"She would associate only with a man in the best

of society, who could strengthen her reputation as well as help her financially. A reveller, no matter how rich, would have compromised her forever, and would have made the marriage of her daughter quite doubtful.

"She had to maintain her household expenses and continue to entertain, in order not to lose the opportunity of finding, among her numerous visitors, the discreet and distinguished friend for whom she was waiting, and whom she would choose.

"I showed her that my thirty thousand francs would have but little likelihood of returning to me; for, after spending them all, she would have to find at least sixty thousand more, in a lump, to pay me back.

"She seemed very disheartened when she heard this. I did not know just what to do, when an idea, a really fine idea, struck me.

"I had just bought this Renaissance Crucifix which I showed you, an admirable piece of workmanship, one of the finest of its kind that I have ever seen.

" 'My dear friend,' I said to her, 'I am going to send you that piece of ivory. You will invent some ingenious, touching, poetic story, anything that you wish, to explain your desire for parting with it. It is, of course, a family heirloom left you by your father.

" 'I myself will send you amateurs, or will bring them to you. The rest concerns you. Before they come I will drop you a line about their position, both social and financial. This Crucifix is worth fifty thousand francs; but I will let it go for thirty thousand. The difference will belong to you.'

"She considered the matter seriously for several minutes, and then answered: 'Yes, it is, perhaps, a good idea. I thank you very much.'

"The next day I sent her my Crucifix, and the same evening the Baron de Saint-Hospital.

"For three months I sent her my best clients, from a business point of view. But I heard nothing more from her.

"One day I received a visit from a foreigner who spoke very little French. I decided to introduce him personally to the baroness, in order to see how she was getting along.

"A footman in black livery received us and ushered us into a quiet little parlor, furnished with taste, where we waited for several minutes. She appeared, charming as usual, extended her hand to me and invited us to be seated; and when I had explained the reason of my visit, she rang.

"The footman appeared.

" 'See if Mlle. Isabelle can let us go into her oratory.' The young girl herself brought the answer. She was about fifteen years of age, modest and good to look upon in the sweet freshness of her youth. She wished to conduct us herself to her chapel.

"It was a kind of religious boudoir where a silver lamp was burning before the Crucifix, my Crucifix, on a background of black velvet. The setting was charming and very clever. The child crossed herself and then said:

" 'Look, gentlemen. Isn't it beautiful?'

"I took the object, examined it and declared it to be remarkable. The foreigner also examined it, but

he seemed much more interested in the two women than in the crucifix.

"A delicate odor of incense, flowers and perfume pervaded the whole house. One felt at home there. This really was a comfortable home, where one would have liked to linger.

"When we had returned to the parlor I delicately broached the subject of the price. Mme. Samoris, lowering her eyes, asked fifty thousand francs.

"Then she added: 'If you wish to see it again, monsieur, I very seldom go out before three o'clock; and I can be found at home every day.'

"In the street the stranger asked me for some details about the baroness, whom he had found charming. But I did not hear anything more from either of them.

"Three months passed by.

"One morning, hardly two weeks ago, she came here at about lunch time, and, placing a roll of bills in my hand, said: 'My dear, you are an angel! Here are fifty thousand francs; *I* am buying your crucifix, and I am paying twenty thousand francs more for it than the price agreed upon, on condition that you always—always send your clients to me—for it is still for sale.'"

# MOTHER AND SON

A PARTY of men were chatting in the smoking room after dinner. We were talking of unexpected legacies, strange inheritances. Then M. le Brument, who was sometimes called "the illustrious judge" and at other times "the illustrious lawyer," went and stood with his back to the fire.

"I have," said he, "to search for an heir who disappeared under peculiarly distressing circumstances. It is one of those simple and terrible dramas of ordinary life, a thing which possibly happens every day, and which is nevertheless one of the most dreadful things I know. Here are the facts:

"Nearly six months ago I was called to the bedside of a dying woman. She said to me:

"'Monsieur, I want to intrust to you the most delicate, the most difficult, and the most wearisome mission that can be conceived. Be good enough to notice my will, which is there on the table. A sum of five thousand francs is left to you as a fee if you do not succeed, and of a hundred thousand francs if you do succeed. I want you to find my son after my death.'

"She asked me to assist her to sit up in bed, in order that she might talk with greater ease, for her voice, broken and gasping, was whistling in her throat.

"It was a very wealthy establishment. The lux-

urious apartment, of an elegant simplicity, was upholstered with materials as thick as walls, with a soft inviting surface.

"The dying woman continued:

"'You are the first to hear my horrible story. I will try to have strength enough to finish it. You must know all, in order that you, whom I know to be a kind-hearted man as well as a man of the world, may have a sincere desire to aid me with all your power.

"'Listen to me:

"'Before my marriage, I loved a young man, whose suit was rejected by my family because he was not rich enough. Not long afterward, I married a man of great wealth. I married him through ignorance, through obedience, through indifference, as young girls do marry.

"'I had a child, a boy. My husband died in the course of a few years.

"'He whom I had loved had married, in his turn. When he saw that I was a widow, he was crushed by grief at knowing he was not free. He came to see me; he wept and sobbed so bitterly, that it was enough to break my heart. He came to see me at first as a friend. Perhaps I ought not to have received him. What could I do? I was alone, so sad, so solitary, so hopeless! And I loved him still. What sufferings we women have sometimes to endure!

"'I had only him in the world, my parents being dead. He came frequently; he spent whole evenings with me. I should not have let him come so often, seeing that he was married. But I had not enough will-power to prevent him from coming.

"'How can I tell it?—he became my lover. How did this come about? Can I explain it? Can any one explain such things? Do you think it could be otherwise when two human beings are drawn to each other by the irresistible force of mutual affection? Do you believe, monsieur, that it is always in our power to resist, that we can keep up the struggle forever, and refuse to yield to the prayers, the supplications, the tears, the frenzied words, the appeals on bended knees, the transports of passion, with which we are pursued by the man we adore, whom we want to gratify even in his slightest wishes, whom we desire to crown with every possible happiness, and whom, if we are to be guided by a worldly code of honor, we must drive to despair? What strength would it not require? What a renunciation of happiness? what self-denial? and even what virtuous selfishness?

"'In short, monsieur, I was his mistress; and I was happy. I became—and this was my greatest weakness and my greatest piece of cowardice—I became his wife's friend.

"'We brought up my son together; we made a man of him, a thorough man, intelligent, full of sense and resolution, of large and generous ideas. The boy reached the age of seventeen.

"'He, the young man, was fond of my—my lover, almost as fond of him as I was myself, for he had been equally cherished and cared for by both of us. He used to call him his 'dear friend,' and respected him immensely, having never received from him anything but wise counsels and an example of integrity, honor, and probity. He looked upon him as an old loyal and devoted comrade of his mother,

as a sort of moral father, guardian, protector—how am I to describe it?

"'Perhaps the reason why he never asked any questions was that he had been accustomed from his earliest years to see this man in my house, at my side, and at his side, always concerned about us both.

"'One evening the three of us were to dine together—this was my chief amusement—and I waited for the two men, asking myself which of them would be the first to arrive. The door opened; it was my old friend. I went toward him, with outstretched arms; and he pressed my lips in a long, delicious kiss.

"'All of a sudden, a slight sound, a faint rustling, that mysterious sensation which indicates the presence of another person, made us start and turn round abruptly. Jean, my son, stood there, livid, staring at us.

"'There was a moment of atrocious confusion. I drew back, holding out my hand toward my son as if in supplication; but I could not see him. He had gone.

"'We remained facing each other—my lover and I—crushed, unable to utter a word. I sank into an armchair, and I felt a desire, a vague, powerful desire, to flee, to go out into the night, and to disappear forever. Then convulsive sobs rose in my throat, and I wept, shaken with spasms, my heart breaking, all my nerves writhing with the horrible sensation of an irreparable misfortune, and with that dreadful sense of shame which, in such moments as this, fills a mother's heart.

"'He looked at me in a terrified manner, not ven-

turing to approach, to speak to me, or to touch me, for fear of the boy's return. At last he said:

"'"I am going to follow him—to talk to him—to explain matters to him. In short, I must see him and let him know——"

"'And he hurried away.

"'I waited—waited in a distracted frame of mind, trembling at the least sound, starting with fear and with some unutterably strange and intolerable emotion at every slight crackling of the fire in the grate.

"'I waited an hour, two hours, feeling my heart swell with a dread I had never before experienced, such anguish that I would not wish the greatest criminal to endure ten minutes of such misery. Where was my son? What was he doing?

"'About midnight, a messenger brought me a note from my lover. I still know its contents by heart:

"'"Has your son returned? I did not find him. I am down here. I do not want to go up at this hour."

"'I wrote in pencil on the same slip of paper:

"'"Jean has not returned. You must find him."

"'And I remained all night in the armchair, waiting for him.

"'I felt as if I were going mad. I longed to run wildly about, to roll on the ground. And yet I did not even stir, but kept waiting hour after hour. What was going to happen? I tried to imagine, to guess. But I could form no conception, in spite of my efforts, in spite of the tortures of my soul!

"'And now I feared that they might meet. What would they do in that case? What would my

son do? My mind was torn with fearful doubts, with terrible suppositions.

"'You can understand my feelings, can you not, monsieur?

"'My chambermaid, who knew nothing, who understood nothing, came into the room every moment, believing, naturally, that I had lost my reason. I sent her away with a word or a movement of the hand. She went for the doctor, who found me in the throes of a nervous attack.

"'I was put to bed. I had brain fever.

"'When I regained consciousness, after a long illness, I saw beside my bed my—lover—alone.

"'I exclaimed:

"'"My son? Where is my son?"

"'He made no reply. I stammered:

"'"Dead—dead. Has he committed suicide?"

"'"No, no, I swear it. But we have not found him in spite of all my efforts."

"'Then, becoming suddenly exasperated and even indignant—for women are subject to such outbursts of unaccountable and unreasoning anger—I said:

"'"I forbid you to come near me or to see me again unless you find him. Go away!"

"He did go away.

"'I have never seen one or the other of them since, monsieur, and thus I have lived for the last twenty years.

"'Can you imagine what all this meant to me? Can you understand this monstrous punishment, this slow, perpetual laceration of a mother's heart, this abominable, endless waiting? Endless, did I say? No; it is about to end, for I am dying. I am dying

without ever again seeing either of them—either one or the other!

"'He—the man I loved—has written to me every day for the last twenty years; and I—I have never consented to see him, even for one second; for I had a strange feeling that, if he were to come back here, my son would make his appearance at the same moment. Oh! my son! my son! Is he dead? Is he living? Where is he hiding? Over there, perhaps, beyond the great ocean, in some country so far away that even its very name is unknown to me! Does he ever think of me? Ah! if he only knew! How cruel one's children are! Did he understand to what frightful suffering he condemned me, into what depths of despair, into what tortures, he cast me while I was still in the prime of life, leaving me to suffer until this moment, when I am about to die —me, his mother, who loved him with all the intensity of a mother's love? Oh! isn't it cruel, cruel?

"'You will tell him all this, monsieur—will you not? You will repeat to him my last words:

"'"My child, my dear, dear child, be less harsh toward poor women! Life is already brutal and savage enough in its dealings with them. My dear son, think of what the existence of your poor mother has been ever since the day you left her. My dear child, forgive her, and love her, now that she is dead, for she has had to endure the most frightful penance ever inflicted on a woman."'

"She gasped for breath, trembling, as if she had addressed the last words to her son and as if he stood by her bedside.

"Then she added:

"'You will tell him also, monsieur, that I never again saw—the other.'

"Once more she ceased speaking, then, in a broken voice, she said:

"'Leave me now, I beg of you. I want to die all alone, since they are not with me.'"

Maitre Le Brument added:

"And I left the house, monsieurs, crying like a fool, so bitterly, indeed, that my coachman turned round to stare at me.

"And to think that, every day, dramas like this are being enacted all around us!

"I have not found the son—that son—well, say what you like about him, but I call him that criminal son!"

# THE HAND

ALL were crowding around M. Bermutier, the judge, who was giving his opinion about the Saint-Cloud mystery. For a month this inexplicable crime had been the talk of Paris. Nobody could make head or tail of it.

M. Bermutier, standing with his back to the fireplace, was talking, citing the evidence, discussing the various theories, but arriving at no conclusion.

Some women had risen, in order to get nearer to him, and were standing with their eyes fastened on the clean-shaven face of the judge, who was saying such weighty things. They were shaking and trembling, moved by fear and curiosity, and by the eager and insatiable desire for the horrible, which haunts the soul of every woman. One of them, paler than the others, said during a pause:

"It's terrible. It verges on the supernatural. The truth will never be known."

The judge turned to her:

"True, madame, it is likely that the actual facts will never be discovered. As for the word 'supernatural' which you have just used, it has nothing to do with the matter. We are in the presence of a very cleverly conceived and executed crime, so well enshrouded in mystery that we cannot disentangle it from the involved circumstances which surround it. But once I had to take charge of an affair in

which the uncanny seemed to play a part. In fact, the case became so confused that it had to be given up."

Several women exclaimed at once:

"Oh! Tell us about it!"

M. Bermutier smiled in a dignified manner, as a judge should, and went on:

"Do not think, however, that I, for one minute, ascribed anything in the case to supernatural influences. I believe only in normal causes. But if, instead of using the word 'supernatural' to express what we do not understand, we were simply to make use of the word 'inexplicable,' it would be much better. At any rate, in the affair of which I am about to tell you, it is especially the surrounding, preliminary circumstances which impressed me. Here are the facts:

"I was, at that time, a judge at Ajaccio, a little white city on the edge of a bay which is surrounded by high mountains.

"The majority of the cases which came up before me concerned vendettas. There are some that are superb, dramatic, ferocious, heroic. We find there the most beautiful causes for revenge of which one could dream, enmities hundreds of years old, quieted for a time but never extinguished; abominable stratagems, murders becoming massacres and almost deeds of glory. For two years I heard of nothing but the price of blood, of this terrible Corsican prejudice which compels revenge for insults meted out to the offending person and all his descendants and relatives. I had seen old men, children, cousins murdered; my head was full of these stories.

"One day I learned that an Englishman had just

hired a little villa at the end of the bay for several years. He had brought with him a French servant, whom he had engaged on the way at Marseilles.

"Soon this peculiar person, living alone, only going out to hunt and fish, aroused a widespread interest. He never spoke to any one, never went to the town, and every morning he would practice for an hour or so with his revolver and rifle.

"Legends were built up around him. It was said that he was some high personage, fleeing from his fatherland for political reasons; then it was affirmed that he was in hiding after having committed some abominable crime. Some particularly horrible circumstances were even mentioned.

"In my judicial position I thought it necessary to get some information about this man, but it was impossible to learn anything. He called himself Sir John Rowell.

"I therefore had to be satisfied with watching him as closely as I could, but I could see nothing suspicious about his actions.

"However, as rumors about him were growing and becoming more widespread, I decided to try to see this stranger myself, and I began to hunt regularly in the neighborhood of his grounds.

"For a long time I watched without finding an opportunity. At last it came to me in the shape of a partridge which I shot and killed right in front of the Englishman. My dog fetched it for me, but, taking the bird, I went at once to Sir John Rowell and, begging his pardon, asked him to accept it.

"He was a big man, with red hair and beard, very tall, very broad, a kind of calm and polite Hercules. He had nothing of the so-called British stiffness,

and in a broad English accent he thanked me warmly for my attention. At the end of a month we had had five or six conversations.

"One night, at last, as I was passing before his door, I saw him in the garden, seated astride a chair, smoking his pipe. I bowed and he invited me to come in and have a glass of beer. I needed no urging.

"He received me with the most punctilious English courtesy, sang the praises of France and of Corsica, and declared that he was quite in love with this country.

"Then, with great caution and under the guise of a vivid interest, I asked him a few questions about his life and his plans. He answered without embarrassment, telling me that he had travelled a great deal in Africa, in the Indies, in America. He added, laughing:

"'I have had many adventures.'

"Then I turned the conversation on hunting, and he gave me the most curious details on hunting the hippopotamus, the tiger, the elephant and even the gorilla.

"I said:

"'Are all these animals dangerous?'

"He smiled:

"'Oh, no! Man is the worst.'

"And he laughed a good broad laugh, the wholesome laugh of a contented Englishman.

"'I have also frequently been man-hunting.'

"Then he began to talk about weapons, and he invited me to come in and see different makes of guns.

"His parlor was draped in black, black silk em-

broidered in gold. Big yellow flowers, as brilliant as fire, were worked on the dark material.

"He said:

" 'It is a Japanese material.'

"But in the middle of the widest panel a strange thing attracted my attention. A black object stood out against a square of red velvet. I went up to it; it was a hand, a human hand. Not the clean white hand of a skeleton, but a dried black hand, with yellow nails, the muscles exposed and traces of old blood on the bones, which were cut off as clean as though it had been chopped off with an axe, near the middle of the forearm.

"Around the wrist, an enormous iron chain, riveted and soldered to this unclean member, fastened it to the wall by a ring, strong enough to hold an elephant in leash.

"I asked:

" 'What is that?'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

" 'That is my best enemy. It comes from America, too. The bones were severed by a sword and the skin cut off with a sharp stone and dried in the sun for a week.'

"I touched these human remains, which must have belonged to a giant. The uncommonly long fingers were attached by enormous tendons which still had pieces of skin hanging to them in places. This hand was terrible to see; it made one think of some savage vengeance.

"I said:

" 'This man must have been very strong.'

"The Englishman answered quietly:

"'Yes, but I was stronger than he. I put on this chain to hold him.'

"I thought that he was joking. I said:

"'This chain is useless now, the hand won't run away.'

"Sir John Rowell answered seriously:

"'It always wants to go away. This chain is needed.'

"I glanced at him quickly, questioning his face, and I asked myself:

"'Is he an insane man or a practical joker?'

"But his face remained inscrutable, calm and friendly. I turned to other subjects, and admired his rifles.

"However, I noticed that he kept three loaded revolvers in the room, as though constantly in fear of some attack.

"I paid him several calls. Then I did not go any more. People had become used to his presence; everybody had lost interest in him.

"A whole year rolled by. One morning, toward the end of November, my servant awoke me and announced that Sir John Rowell had been murdered during the night.

"Half an hour later I entered the Englishman's house, together with the police commissioner and the captain of the gendarmes. The servant, bewildered and in despair, was crying before the door. At first I suspected this man, but he was innocent.

"The guilty party could never be found.

"On entering Sir John's parlor, I noticed the body, stretched out on its back, in the middle of the room.

"His vest was torn, the sleeve of his jacket had been pulled off, everything pointed to a violent struggle.

"The Englishman had been strangled! His face was black, swollen and frightful, and seemed to express a terrible fear. He held something between his teeth, and his neck, pierced by five or six holes which looked as though they had been made by some iron instrument, was covered with blood.

"A physician joined us. He examined the finger marks on the neck for a long time and then made this strange announcement:

" 'It looks as though he had been strangled by a skeleton.'

"A cold chill seemed to run down my back, and I looked over to where I had formerly seen the terrible hand. It was no longer there. The chain was hanging down, broken.

"I bent over the dead man and, in his contracted mouth, I found one of the fingers of this vanished hand, cut—or rather sawed off by the teeth down to the second knuckle.

"Then the investigation began. Nothing could be discovered. No door, window or piece of furniture had been forced. The two watch dogs had not been aroused from their sleep.

"Here, in a few words, is the testimony of the servant:

"For a month his master had seemed excited. He had received many letters, which he would immediately burn.

"Often, in a fit of passion which approached madness, he had taken a switch and struck wildly at this dried hand riveted to the wall, and which had dis-

appeared, no one knows how, at the very hour of the crime.

"He would go to bed very late and carefully lock himself in. He always kept weapons within reach. Often at night he would talk loudly, as though he were quarrelling with some one.

"That night, somehow, he had made no noise, and it was only on going to open the windows that the servant had found Sir John murdered. He suspected no one.

"I communicated what I knew of the dead man to the judges and public officials. Throughout the whole island a minute investigation was carried on. Nothing could be found out.

"One night, about three months after the crime, I had a terrible nightmare. I seemed to see the horrible hand running over my curtains and walls like an immense scorpion or spider. Three times I awoke, three times I went to sleep again; three times I saw the hideous object galloping round my room and moving its fingers like legs.

"The following day the hand was brought me, found in the cemetery, on the grave of Sir John Rowell, who had been buried there because we had been unable to find his family. The first finger was missing.

"Ladies, there is my story. I know nothing more."

The women, deeply stirred, were pale and trembling. One of them exclaimed:

"But that is neither a climax nor an explanation! We will be unable to sleep unless you give us your opinion of what had occurred."

The judge smiled severely:

"Oh! Ladies, I shall certainly spoil your terrible dreams. I simply believe that the legitimate owner of the hand was not dead, that he came to get it with his remaining one. But I don't know how. It was a kind of vendetta."

One of the women murmured:

"No, it can't be that."

And the judge, still smiling, said:

"Didn't I tell you that my explanation would not satisfy you?"

# THE LOG

THE drawing-room was small, full of heavy draperies and discreetly fragrant. A large fire burned in the grate and a solitary lamp at one end of the mantelpiece threw a soft light on the two persons who were talking.

She, the mistress of the house, was an old lady with white hair, but one of those old ladies whose unwrinkled skin is as smooth as the finest paper, and scented, impregnated with perfume, with the delicate essences which she had used in her bath for so many years.

He was a very old friend, who had never married, a constant friend, a companion in the journey of life, but nothing more.

They had not spoken for about a minute, and were both looking at the fire, dreaming of no matter what, in one of those moments of friendly silence between people who have no need to be constantly talking in order to be happy together, when suddenly a large log, a stump covered with burning roots, fell out. It fell over the firedogs into the drawing-room and rolled on to the carpet, scattering great sparks around it. The old lady, with a little scream, sprang to her feet to run away, while he kicked the log back on to the hearth and stamped out all the burning sparks with his boots.

When the disaster was remedied, there was a

strong smell of burning, and, sitting down opposite to his friend, the man looked at her with a smile and said, as he pointed to the log:

"That is the reason why I never married."

She looked at him in astonishment, with the inquisitive gaze of women who wish to know everything, that eye which women have who are no longer very young, in which a complex, and often roguish, curiosity is reflected, and she asked:

"How so?"

"Oh, it is a long story," he replied; "a rather sad and unpleasant story.

"My old friends were often surprised at the coldness which suddenly sprang up between one of my best friends, whose Christian name was Julien, and myself. They could not understand how two such intimate and inseparable friends, as we had been, could suddenly become almost strangers to one another, and I will tell you the reason of it.

"He and I used to live together at one time. We were never apart, and the friendship that united us seemed so strong that nothing could break it.

"One evening when he came home, he told me that he was going to get married, and it gave me a shock as if he had robbed me or betrayed me. When a man's friend marries, it is all over between them. The jealous affection of a woman, that suspicious, uneasy and carnal affection, will not tolerate the sturdy and frank attachment, that attachment of the mind, of the heart, and that mutual confidence which exists between two men.

"You see, however great the love may be that unites them, a man and a woman are always strangers in mind and intellect; they remain belligerents,

they belong to different races. There must always be a conqueror and a conquered, a master and a slave; now the one, now the other—they are never two equals. They press each other's hands, those hands trembling with amorous passion; but they never press them with a long, strong, loyal pressure, with that pressure which seems to open hearts and to lay them bare in a burst of sincere, strong, manly affection. Philosophers of old, instead of marrying, and procreating as a consolation for their old age children, who would abandon them, sought for a good, reliable friend, and grew old with him in that communion of thought which can only exist between men.

"Well, my friend Julien married. His wife was pretty, charming, a little, curly-haired blonde, plump and lively, who seemed to worship him. At first I went but rarely to their house, feeling myself *de trop*. But, somehow, they attracted me to their home; they were constantly inviting me, and seemed very fond of me. Consequently, by degrees, I allowed myself to be allured by the charm of their life. I often dined with them, and frequently, when I returned home at night, thought that I would do as he had done, and get married, as my empty house now seemed very dull.

"They appeared to be very much in love, and were never apart.

"Well, one evening Julien wrote and asked me to go to dinner, and I naturally went.

" 'My dear fellow,' he said, 'I must go out directly afterward on business, and I shall not be back until eleven o'clock; but I shall be back at eleven precisely, and I reckon on you to keep Bertha company.'

"The young woman smiled.

" 'It was my idea,' she said, 'to send for you.'

"I held out my hand to her.

" 'You are as nice as ever, I said, and I felt a long, friendly pressure of my fingers, but I paid no attention to it; so we sat down to dinner, and at eight o'clock Julien went out.

"As soon as he had gone, a kind of strange embarrassment immediately seemed to arise between his wife and me. We had never been alone together yet, and in spite of our daily increasing intimacy, this *tête-à-tête* placed us in a new position. At first I spoke vaguely of those indifferent matters with which one fills up an embarrassing silence, but she did not reply, and remained opposite to me with her head down in an undecided manner, as if she were thinking over some difficult subject, and as I was at a loss for small talk, I held my tongue. It is surprising how hard it is at times to find anything to say.

"And then also I felt something in the air, something I could not express, one of those mysterious premonitions that warn one of another person's secret intentions in regard to yourself, whether they be good or evil.

"That painful silence lasted some time, and then Bertha said to me:

" 'Will you kindly put a log on the fire for it is going out.'

"So I opened the box where the wood was kept, which was placed just where yours is, took out the largest log and put it on top of the others, which were three parts burned, and then silence again reigned in the room.

"In a few minutes the log was burning so brightly that it scorched our faces, and the young woman raised her eyes to mine—eyes that had a strange look to me.

" 'It is too hot now,' she said; 'let us go and sit on the sofa over there.'

"So we went and sat on the sofa, and then she said suddenly, looking me full in the face:

" 'What would you do if a woman were to tell you that she was in love with you?'

" 'Upon my word,' I replied, very much at a loss for an answer, 'I cannot foresee such a case; but it would depend very much upon the woman.'

"She gave a hard, nervous, vibrating laugh; one of those false laughs which seem as if they must break thin glass, and then she added: 'Men are never either venturesome or spiteful.' And, after a moment's silence, she continued: 'Have you ever been in love, Monsieur Paul?' I was obliged to acknowledge that I certainly had, and she asked me to tell her all about it. Whereupon I made up some story or other. She listened to me attentively, with frequent signs of disapproval and contempt, and then suddenly she said:

" 'No, you understand nothing about the subject. It seems to me that real love must unsettle the mind, upset the nerves and distract the head; that it must —how shall I express it?—be dangerous, even terrible, almost criminal and sacrilegious; that it must be a kind of treason; I mean to say that it is bound to break laws, fraternal bonds, sacred obligations; when love is tranquil, easy, lawful and without dangers, is it really love?'

"I did not know what answer to give her, and I

made this philosophical reflection to myself: 'Oh! female brain, here, indeed, you show yourself!'

"While speaking, she had assumed a demure, saintly air; and, resting on the cushions, she stretched herself out at full length, with her head on my shoulder, and her dress pulled up a little so as to show her red stockings, which the firelight made look still brighter. In a minute or two she continued:

"'I suppose I have frightened you?' I protested against such a notion, and she leaned against my breast altogether, and without looking at me, she said: 'If I were to tell you that I love you, what would you do?'

"And before I could think of an answer, she had thrown her arms around my neck, had quickly drawn my head down, and put her lips to mine.

"Oh! My dear friend, I can tell you that I did not feel at all happy! What! deceive Julien? become the lover of this little, silly, wrong-headed, deceitful woman, who was, no doubt, terribly sensual, and whom her husband no longer satisfied! To betray him continually, to deceive him, to play at being in love merely because I was attracted by forbidden fruit, by the danger incurred and the friendship betrayed! No, that did not suit me, but what was I to do? To imitate Joseph would be acting a very stupid and, moreover, difficult part, for this woman was enchanting in her perfidy, inflamed by audacity, palpitating and excited. Let the man who has never felt on his lips the warm kiss of a woman who is ready to give herself to him throw the first stone at me——

"Well, a minute more—you understand what I

mean? A minute more, and—I should have been—no, she would have been!—I beg your pardon, he would have been—when a loud noise made us both jump up. The log had fallen into the room, knocking over the fire irons and the fender, and on to the carpet, which it had scorched, and had rolled under an armchair, which it would certainly set alight.

"I jumped up like a madman, and, as I was replacing on the fire that log which had saved me, the door opened hastily, and Julien came in.

" 'I am free,' he said, with evident pleasure. 'The business was over two hours sooner than I expected!'

"Yes, my dear friend, without that log, I should have been caught in the very act, and you know what the consequences would have been!

"You may be sure that I took good care never to be found in a similar situation again, never, never. Soon afterward I saw that Julien was giving me the 'cold shoulder,' as they say. His wife was evidently undermining our friendship. By degrees he got rid of me, and we have altogether ceased to meet.

"I never married, which ought not to surprise you, I think."

# THE FALSE GEMS

MONSIEUR LANTIN had met the young girl at a reception at the house of the second head of his department, and had fallen head over heels in love with her.

She was the daughter of a provincial tax collector, who had been dead several years. She and her mother came to live in Paris, where the latter, who made the acquaintance of some of the families in her neighborhood, hoped to find a husband for her daughter.

They had very moderate means, and were honorable, gentle, and quiet.

The young girl was a perfect type of the virtuous woman in whose hands every sensible young man dreams of one day intrusting his happiness. Her simple beauty had the charm of angelic modesty, and the imperceptible smile which constantly hovered about the lips seemed to be the reflection of a pure and lovely soul. Her praises resounded on every side. People never tired of repeating: "Happy the man who wins her love! He could not find a better wife."

Monsieur Lantin, then chief clerk in the Department of the Interior, enjoyed a snug little salary of three thousand five hundred francs, and he proposed to this model young girl, and was accepted.

He was unspeakably happy with her. She gov-

erned his household with such clever economy that they seemed to live in luxury. She lavished the most delicate attentions on her husband, coaxed and fondled him; and so great was her charm that six years after their marriage, Monsieur Lantin discovered that he loved his wife even more than during the first days of their honeymoon.

He found fault with only two of her tastes: Her love for the theatre, and her taste for imitation jewelry. Her friends (the wives of some petty officials) frequently procured for her a box at the theatre, often for the first representations of the new plays; and her husband was obliged to accompany her, whether he wished it or not, to these entertainments which bored him excessively after his day's work at the office.

After a time, Monsieur Lantin begged his wife to request some lady of her acquaintance to accompany her, and to bring her home after the theatre. She opposed this arrangement, at first; but, after much persuasion, finally consented, to the infinite delight of her husband.

Now, with her love for the theatre, came also the desire for ornaments. Her costumes remained as before, simple, in good taste, and always modest; but she soon began to adorn her ears with huge rhinestones, which glittered and sparkled like real diamonds. Around her neck she wore strings of false pearls, on her arms bracelets of imitation gold, and combs set with glass jewels.

Her husband frequently remonstrated with her, saying:

"My dear, as you cannot afford to buy real jewelry, you ought to appear adorned with your

beauty and modesty alone, which are the rarest ornaments of your sex."

But she would smile sweetly, and say:

"What can I do? I am so fond of jewelry. It is my only weakness. We cannot change our nature."

Then she would wind the pearl necklace round her fingers, make the facets of the crystal gems sparkle, and say:

"Look! are they not lovely? One would swear they were real."

Monsieur Lantin would then answer, smilingly:

"You have bohemian tastes, my dear."

Sometimes, of an evening, when they were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by the fireside, she would place on the tea table the morocco leather box containing the "trash," as Monsieur Lantin called it. She would examine the false gems with a passionate attention, as though they imparted some deep and secret joy; and she often persisted in passing a necklace around her husband's neck, and, laughing heartily, would exclaim: "How droll you look!" Then she would throw herself into his arms, and kiss him affectionately.

One evening, in winter, she had been to the opera, and returned home chilled through and through. The next morning she coughed, and eight days later she died of inflammation of the lungs.

Monsieur Lantin's despair was so great that his hair became white in one month. He wept unceasingly; his heart was broken as he remembered her smile, her voice, every charm of his dead wife.

Time did not assuage his grief. Often, during office hours, while his colleagues were discussing the

topics of the day, his eyes would suddenly fill with tears, and he would give vent to his grief in heart-rending sobs. Everything in his wife's room remained as it was during her lifetime; all her furniture, even her clothing, being left as it was on the day of her death. Here he was wont to seclude himself daily and think of her who had been his treasure—the joy of his existence.

But life soon became a struggle. His income, which, in the hands of his wife, covered all household expenses, was now no longer sufficient for his own immediate wants; and he wondered how she could have managed to buy such excellent wine and the rare delicacies which he could no longer procure with his modest resources.

He incurred some debts, and was soon reduced to absolute poverty. One morning, finding himself without a cent in his pocket, he resodved to sell something, and immediately the thought occurred to him of disposing of his wife's paste jewels, for he cherished in his heart a sort of rancor against these "deceptions," which had always irritated him in the past. The very sight of them spoiled, somewhat, the memory of his lost darling.

To the last days of her life she had continued to make purchases, bringing home new gems almost every evening, and he turned them over some time before finally deciding to sell the heavy necklace, which she seemed to prefer, and which, he thought, ought to be worth about six or seven francs; for it was of very fine workmanship, though only imitation.

He put it in his pocket, and started out in search of what seemed a reliable jeweler's shop. At length

he found one, and went in, feeling a little ashamed to expose his misery, and also to offer such a worthless article for sale.

"Sir," said he to the merchant, "I would like to know what this is worth."

The man took the necklace, examined it, called his clerk, and made some remarks in an undertone; he then put the ornament back on the counter, and looked at it from a distance to judge of the effect.

Monsieur Lantin, annoyed at all these ceremonies, was on the point of saying: "Oh! I know well enough it is not worth anything," when the jeweler said: "Sir, that necklace is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand francs; but I could not buy it, unless you can tell me exactly where it came from."

The widower opened his eyes wide and remained gaping, not comprehending the merchant's meaning. Finally he stammered: "You say—are you sure?" The other replied, drily: "You can try elsewhere, and see if any one will offer you more. I consider it worth fifteen thousand at the most. Come back here, if you cannot do better."

Monsieur Lantin, beside himself with astonishment, took up the necklace and left the store. He wished time for reflection.

Once outside, he felt inclined to laugh, and said to himself: "The fool! Oh, the fool! Had I only taken him at his word! That jeweler cannot distinguish real diamonds from the imitation article."

A few minutes after, he entered another store, in the Rue de la Paix. As soon as the proprietor glanced at the necklace, he cried out:

"Ah, *parbleu!* I know it well; it was bought here."

Monsieur Lantin, greatly disturbed, asked:

"How much is it worth?"

"Well, I sold it for twenty thousand francs. I am willing to take it back for eighteen thousand, when you inform me, according to our legal formality, how it came to be in your possession."

This time, Monsieur Lantin was dumfounded. He replied:

"But—but—examine it well. Until this moment I was under the impression that it was imitation."

The jeweler asked:

"What is your name, sir?"

"Lantin—I am in the employ of the Minister of the Interior. I live at number sixteen Rue des Martyrs."

The merchant looked through his books, found the entry, and said: "That necklace was sent to Madame Lantin's address, sixteen Rue des Martyrs, July 20, 1876."

The two men looked into each other's eyes—the widower speechless with astonishment; the jeweler scenting a thief. The latter broke the silence.

"Will you leave this necklace here for twenty-four hours?" said he; "I will give you a receipt."

Monsieur Lantin answered hastily: "Yes, certainly." Then, putting the ticket in his pocket, he left the store.

He wandered aimlessly through the streets, his mind in a state of dreadful confusion. He tried to reason, to understand. His wife could not afford to purchase such a costly ornament. Certainly not.

But, then, it must have been a present!—a present!—a present, from whom? Why was it given her?

He stopped, and remained standing in the middle of the street. A horrible doubt entered his mind—She? Then, all the other jewels must have been presents, too! The earth seemed to tremble beneath him—the tree before him to be falling; he threw up his arms, and fell to the ground, unconscious. He recovered his senses in a pharmacy, into which the passers-by had borne him. He asked to be taken home, and, when he reached the house, he shut himself up in his room, and wept until nightfall. Finally, overcome with fatigue, he went to bed and fell into a heavy sleep.

The sun awoke him next morning, and he began to dress slowly to go to the office. It was hard to work after such shocks. He sent a letter to his employer, requesting to be excused. Then he remembered that he had to return to the jeweler's. He did not like the idea; but he could not leave the necklace with that man. He dressed and went out.

It was a lovely day; a clear, blue sky smiled on the busy city below. Men of leisure were strolling about with their hands in their pockets.

Monsieur Lantin, observing them, said to himself: "The rich, indeed, are happy. With money it is possible to forget even the deepest sorrow. One can go where one pleases, and in travel find that distraction which is the surest cure for grief. Oh! if I were only rich!"

He perceived that he was hungry, but his pocket was empty. He again remembered the necklace. Eighteen thousand francs! Eighteen thousand francs! What a sum!

He soon arrived in the Rue de la Paix, opposite the jeweler's. Eighteen thousand francs! Twenty times he resolved to go in, but shame kept him back. He was hungry, however—very hungry—and not a cent in his pocket. He decided quickly, ran across the street, in order not to have time for reflection, and rushed into the store.

The proprietor immediately came forward, and politely offered him a chair; the clerks glanced at him knowingly.

"I have made inquiries, Monsieur Lantin," said the jeweler, "and if you are still resolved to dispose of the gems, I am ready to pay you the price I offered."

"Certainly, sir," stammered Monsieur Lantin.

Whereupon the proprietor took from a drawer eighteen large bills, counted, and handed them to Monsieur Lantin, who signed a receipt; and, with trembling hand, put the money into his pocket.

As he was about to leave the store, he turned toward the merchant, who still wore the same knowing smile, and lowering his eyes, said:

"I have—I have other gems, which came from the same source. Will you buy them, also?'

The merchant bowed: "Certainly, sir."

Monsieur Lantin said gravely: "I will bring them to you." An hour later, he returned with the gems.

The large diamond earrings were worth twenty thousand francs; the bracelets, thirty-five thousand; the rings, sixteen thousand; a set of emeralds and sapphires, fourteen thousand; a gold chain with solitaire pendant, forty thousand—making the sum of one hundred and forty-three thousand francs.

The jeweler remarked, jokingly:

"There was a person who invested all her savings in precious stones."

Monsieur Lantin replied, seriously:

"It is only another way of investing one's money."

That day he lunched at Voisin's, and drank wine worth twenty francs a bottle. Then he hired a carriage and made a tour of the Bois. He gazed at the various turnouts with a kind of disdain, and could hardly refrain from crying out to the occupants:

"I, too, am rich!—I am worth two hundred thousand francs."

Suddenly he thought of his employer. He drove up to the bureau, and entered gaily, saying:

"Sir, I have come to resign my position. I have just inherited three hundred thousand francs."

He shook hands with his former colleagues, and confided to them some of his projects for the future; he then went off to dine at the Café Anglais.

He seated himself beside a gentleman of aristocratic bearing; and, during the meal, informed the latter confidentially that he had just inherited a fortune of four hundred thousand francs.

For the first time in his life, he was not bored at the theatre, and spent the remainder of the night in a gay frolic.

Six months afterward, he married again. His second wife was a very virtuous woman; but had a violent temper. She caused him much sorrow.

# A WIFE'S CONFESSION

MY friend, you have asked me to relate to you the most striking recollections of my life. I am very old, without relatives, without children; so I am free to make a confession to you. But promise me that you will never reveal my name.

I have had many admirers, as you know; I have often been in love. I was very beautiful; I may say this to-day, when my beauty is gone. Love was for me the life of the soul just as the air is the life of the body. I would have preferred to die rather than to exist without affection, without having some one who was always thinking of me. Women often say one can love but once with all the strength of one's heart. I have often been so desperately in love that I thought it would never end; but the feeling died out naturally like a fire lacking fuel.

I will tell you to-day the first of my adventures, in which I was very innocent, but which led to the others. The horrible vengeance of that dreadful druggist of Pecq recalls to me the shocking drama of which I was, in spite of myself, a spectator.

I had been married a year to a rich man, Comte Hervé de Ker—a Breton of ancient family, whom I did not love, you understand. True love needs, it seems to me, freedom and impediments at the same time. The love which is imposed, sanctioned by law, and blessed by the priest—can we really call that

love? A legal kiss is never as good as a stolen kiss. My husband was tall in stature, elegant, and a really fine gentleman in his manners. But he lacked intelligence. He spoke in a positive manner, and uttered trenchant opinions. He created the impression that his mind was full of ready-made views instilled into him by his father and mother, who had themselves got them from their ancestors. He never hesitated, but at once expressed his narrow-minded views without embarrassment, and without realizing that there might be other ways of looking at things. One felt that his head was hermetically sealed, that no ideas circulated in it, none of those ideas which renew one's mind and make it healthy, like a breath of fresh air passing through a house with doors and windows open.

The country house we occupied was situated in the midst of a desolate tract of country. It was a large, melancholy structure, surrounded by enormous trees, with tufts of moss on them that recalled old men's white beards. The park, a real forest, was inclosed by a trench called a ha-ha; and at its extremity, near the moorland, we had big ponds full of reeds and floating grass. Between the two, at the edge of a stream which connected them, my husband built a little hut for shooting wild ducks.

We had, in addition to our ordinary staff of servants, a keeper, a sort of brute, devoted to my husband to the death, and a chambermaid, almost a friend, passionately attached to me. I had brought her back from Spain with me five years before. She was a foundling. She might have been taken for a gypsy with her dusky skin, her dark eyes, her hair, thick as a wood, and always waving around her fore-

head. She was then sixteen years old, but she looked twenty.

The autumn was beginning. We had a great many shooting parties, sometimes on neighboring estates, sometimes on our own; and I noticed a young man, the Baron de C——, whose visits at our home became singularly frequent. Then he ceased to come; I thought no more about it; but I perceived that my husband had changed in his demeanor toward me.

He seemed taciturn and preoccupied; he did not kiss me; and, in spite of the fact that he seldom came into my room, as I insisted on separate apartments in order that I might live my own life occasionally, I often heard a furtive step drawing near my door at night, and retiring again within a few minutes.

As my window was on the ground floor, I thought I had also often heard some one prowling in the shadow around the house. I told my husband about it, and, having looked at me intently for some seconds, he answered:

"It is nothing—it is the watchman."

Now, one evening, just after dinner, Hervé, who appeared to be extraordinarily cheerful, with a saturnine sort of cheerfulness, said to me:

"Would you like to spend three hours out with the guns, in order to shoot a fox who comes every evening to eat my hens?"

I was surprised. I hesitated; but, as he kept staring at me with singular persistency, I ended by replying:

"Why, certainly, my friend." I must tell you

that I could hunt the wolf and the wild boar as well as a man; so it was quite natural that he should suggest this shooting expedition to me.

But my husband, all of a sudden, had a curiously nervous look; and all the evening he kept rising up and sitting down feverishly.

About ten o'clock, he suddenly said to me: "Are you ready?"

I rose; and, as he was bringing me my gun himself, I asked:

"Are we to load with bullets or with deershot?"

He showed some astonishment; then he rejoined:

"Oh! only with deershot; that will be enough, you may be sure!"

Then, after some seconds, he added in a peculiar tone:

"You can boast of splendid presence of mind!"

I burst out laughing.

"I? Why, pray? Presence of mind because I am going to kill a fox? But what do you mean, my friend?"

And we quietly made our way across the park. All the household was asleep. The full moon seemed to give a yellow tint to the old gloomy building, whose slate roof shone brightly. The two turrets that flanked it had two patches of light on their summits, and no noise disturbed the silence of this clear, sad night, sweet and still, which seemed in a death trance. Not a breath of air, not a croak from a toad, not a hoot from an owl; a melancholy torpor seemed to oppress nature. When we reached the trees in the park there was a chill in the air and an odor of fallen leaves. My husband said nothing;

but he was listening, he was watching, he seemed to be scenting about in the shadows, possessed from head to foot by his passion for the chase.

We soon reached the edge of the ponds.

Their border of rushes remained motionless; not a breath of air stirred it; but at a certain point a little disturbance in the water would cause a circle to form, which gradually gave rise to other larger circles, spreading out indefinitely.

When we reached the hut where we were to lie in wait, my husband made me go in first; then he slowly loaded his gun, and the dry rattle of the hammer produced a strange effect on me. He saw that I was shuddering, and asked:

"Perhaps this test is enough for you? If so, go back."

I was much surprised, and replied:

"Not at all. I did not come to go back without doing anything. How peculiar you are this evening!"

He murmured: "As you wish," and we remained there without moving.

At the end of about half an hour, as nothing broke the oppressive stillness of this bright autumn night, I said, in a low tone:

"Are you quite sure it passes this way?"

Hervé winced as if I had bitten him, and with his mouth close to my ear, he said: "I am quite sure; do you understand?"

And once more there was silence.

I believe I was beginning to get drowsy when my husband pressed my arm, and, in a hissing tone, he said:

"Do you see him over there under the trees?"

I looked in vain; I could distinguish nothing. And slowly Hervé now cocked his gun, all the time fixing his eyes on my face.

I was preparing to fire, when suddenly, thirty paces in front of us, appeared in the full light of the moon a man who was hurrying forward with rapid movements, his body bent, as if he were trying to escape.

I was so astounded that I uttered a loud cry; but, before I could turn round, there was a flash before my eyes; I heard a deafening report, and I saw the man rolling on the ground, like a wolf hit by a bullet.

I was terrified, almost beside myself, and I uttered dreadful shrieks. Then a furious hand—it was Hervé's—seized me by the throat. I was flung down on the ground, then lifted up in his strong arms. He ran, carrying me, till we reached the body lying on the grass and he threw me on top of it violently, as if he wanted to break my head.

I felt it was all over with me; he was going to kill me, and he had just raised his heel to my forehead when, in his turn, he was gripped, knocked down before I could realize what had happened.

I sat up abruptly, and I saw kneeling on top of him Paquita, my maid, clinging to him with desperate energy, like a wildcat, tearing his beard, his mustache, and the skin of his face.

Then, as if another idea had suddenly taken possession of her, she rose, and flinging herself on the corpse, she threw her arms round the dead man, kissing his eyes and his mouth, seeking his dead lips with her own, trying to find in them a breath and a long, long, lover's kiss.

My husband, picking himself up, gazed at me. He understood, and falling at my feet, said:

"Oh! forgive me, my darling, I suspected you, and I killed this girl's lover. It was my watchman that deceived me."

But I was watching the strange kisses of that dead man and that living woman, her sobs and her writhings of despairing love.

And from that moment I understood that I should be unfaithful to my husband.

# CHALI

"I HAD a very singular adventure once," said Admiral de la Vallée, who had been dozing in his armchair. His voice was like an old woman's and he had that eternal, dry, wrinkled smile à la Voltaire, that made people think he was a dreadful skeptic.

I was thirty years of age and first lieutenant in the navy, when I was placed in charge of an astronomical expedition to Central India. The English Government provided me with all the necessary means for carrying out my enterprise, and I was soon busied with a few assistants in that strange, surprising country.

It would take ten volumes to relate that journey. I went through wonderfully magnificent regions, and was received by strangely handsome princes, who entertained me with incredible magnificence. For two months it seemed to me as if I were one of the actors in a poet's fancy in a fairy kingdom, on the back of imaginary elephants. In the midst of wild forests I discovered extraordinary ruins, delicate and chiselled like jewels, flimsy as lace and enormous as mountains, those fabulous, divine monuments which are so graceful that one falls in love with their form as one falls in love with a woman, and feels a physical and sensual pleasure in looking at them.

As Victor Hugo says, "Although wide awake, I was walking in a dream."

Toward the end of my journey I reached Ganhard, which was formerly one of the most prosperous towns in Central India, but is now much decayed and governed by a wealthy, arbitrary, violent, generous, and cruel prince. His name is Rajah Maddan, a true Oriental potentate, delicate and barbarous, affable and sanguinary, combining feminine gentleness with pitiless ferocity.

The city lies at the bottom of a valley, on the banks of a little lake, surrounded by pagodas, whose walls are washed by its waters.

At a distance the city looks like a white spot which grows larger as one approaches it, and gradually one discovers the domes and spires, all the slender and graceful characteristics of Indian monuments.

At about an hour's distance from the gates, I met a superbly caparisoned elephant, surrounded by a guard of honor which the sovereign had sent me, and I was conducted to the palace with great ceremony.

I should have liked to have taken time to put on my gala uniform, but royal impatience would not admit of it. The rajah was anxious to make my acquaintance, to know what he might expect from me.

I was introduced into a great hall surrounded by galleries, in the midst of bronze-colored soldiers in splendid uniforms; all about me stood men dressed in striking robes studded with precious stones.

I saw a shining mass, a kind of resplendent sun, reposing on a bench like our garden benches, without a back; it was the rajah, who was waiting for

me, motionless, in a robe of the purest canary color. He had some ten or fifteen million of francs' worth of diamonds on him, and, by itself, on his forehead glistened the famous star of Delhi, which has always belonged to the illustrious dynasty of the Pariharas of Mundore, from whom my host was descended.

He was a man of about five-and-twenty, who appeared to have some negro blood in his veins, although he belonged to the purest Hindoo race. He had large, almost motionless, somewhat expressionless eyes, full lips, a curly beard, low forehead, and dazzling sharp white teeth, which he frequently showed in a mechanical smile. He got up and gave me his hand in the English fashion, and then made me sit down beside him on a bench which was so high that my feet hardly touched the ground, and I was very uncomfortable.

He immediately proposed a tiger hunt for the next day. War and hunting were his chief occupations, and he could hardly understand how one could care for anything else. He was evidently fully persuaded that I had only come all that distance to amuse him a little, and to be the companion of his pleasures.

As I stood greatly in need of his assistance, I tried to flatter his tastes, and he was so pleased that he immediately wished to show me how his trained boxers fought, and led the way into a kind of arena situated within the palace.

At his command two naked men appeared, their hands covered with steel claws. They immediately began to attack each other, trying to strike one another with these sharp weapons, which left long cuts,

from which the blood flowed freely down their dark skin.

This lasted till their bodies were a mass of wounds, from tearing each other's flesh with this sort of rake with sharp-pointed prongs. One of them had his jaw smashed, while the ear of the other was split into three pieces.

The prince looked on with ferocious pleasure, uttered grunts of delight, and imitated all their movements with careless gestures, crying out constantly:

"Strike, strike hard!"

One fell down unconscious, and had to be carried out of the arena, covered with blood, while the rajah uttered a sigh of regret because it was so soon over.

He turned to me to know my opinion; I was disgusted, but congratulated him loudly. He then gave orders that I was to be conducted to Couch-Mahal—the palace of pleasure—where I was to be lodged.

This bijou palace was situated at the extremity of the royal park, and one of its walls was built into the sacred lake of Vihara. It was square and had three rows of galleries with colonnades of most beautiful workmanship. At each angle there were light, lofty or low towers, either single or in pairs; no two were alike, and they looked like flowers growing out of that graceful plant of Oriental architecture. All were surmounted by fantastic roofs, like coquettish ladies' hats.

In the middle of the edifice a large white dome raised its round cupola beside a beautiful clock tower.

The whole building was sculptured in arabesques from top to bottom; those exquisite traceries which

delight the eye; motionless processions of delicate figures whose attitudes and gestures told in stone the story of Indian manners and customs.

The rooms were lighted by arched windows overlooking the gardens. On the marble floor were graceful bouquets designed in onyx, lapis-lazuli, and agate.

I had scarcely time to finish my toilet when Haribadada, a court dignitary who was specially charged to communicate with me, announced his sovereign's visit.

The saffron-colored rajah appeared, again shook hands with me, and began to tell me a thousand different things, constantly asking me for my opinion, which I had great difficulty in giving him. Then he wished to show me the ruins of the former palace at the other extremity of the gardens.

It was a real forest of stones inhabited by a tribe of large apes. On our approach the males began to run along the walls, making the most hideous faces at us, while the females ran away, carrying off their young in their arms. The rajah shouted with laughter and pinched my arm to draw my attention and to testify his own delight, and sat down in the midst of the ruins; while, around us, squatting on the top of the walls, perching on every eminence, a number of animals with white whiskers, put out their tongues and shook their fists at us.

When he had seen enough of this, the yellow rajah rose and began to walk along sedately, keeping me always at his side, happy at having shown me such things on the very day of my arrival, and reminding me that a grand tiger hunt was to take place the next day, in my honor.

I was present, and also at a second, third, and at ten, twenty in succession. We hunted all the animals which the country produces; the panther, the bear, elephant, antelope, the hippopotamus, and the crocodile—and how many more I know not, half the animals in the world, I should say. I was disgusted at seeing so much blood flow, and tired of this monotonous pleasure.

At length the prince's ardor abated and, at my urgent request, he left me a little leisure for work, and contented himself by loading me with costly presents. He sent me jewels, magnificent stuffs, and well-broken animals of all sorts, which Haribadada presented to me with apparently as grave respect as if I had been the sun himself, although he heartily despised me at the bottom of his heart.

Every day a procession of servants brought me in covered dishes, a portion of each course that was served at the royal table; every day he seemed to take an extreme pleasure in getting up some new entertainment for me—dances by the bayaderes, jugglers, reviews of the troops, and I was obliged to pretend to enjoy it all so as not to hurt his feelings when he wished to show me his wonderful country in all its charm and all its splendor.

As soon as I was left alone for a few moments I either worked or went to see the monkeys, whose company pleased me a great deal better than that of their royal master.

One evening, however, on coming back from a walk, I found Haribadada outside the gate of my palace. He told me in mysterious tones that a gift from the king was waiting for me in my room, and he said that his master begged me to excuse him for

not having sooner thought of offering me that of which I had been deprived for such a long time.

After these obscure remarks the ambassador bowed and withdrew.

When I went in I saw six little girls standing against the wall, motionless, side by side, like smelts on a skewer. The eldest was perhaps ten, and the youngest eight years old. For the first moment I could not understand why this girls' school had taken up its abode in my rooms; then, however, I divined the prince's delicate attention: he had made me a present of a harem, and had chosen it very young from an excess of generosity.

For some time I remained confused and embarrassed, ashamed in the presence of these children, who looked at me with great grave eyes which seemed already to divine what I should want of them.

I did not know what to say to them; I felt inclined to send them back; but one cannot return the presents of a prince; it would have been a mortal insult. I was obliged, therefore, to keep them, and to install this troop of children in my rooms.

They stood motionless, looking at me, waiting for my orders, trying to read my thoughts in my eyes. Confound such a present! How dreadfully it was in my way! At last, thinking that I must look rather ridiculous, I asked the eldest her name.

"Châli," she replied.

This little creature, with her beautiful skin, which was slightly yellow, like old ivory, was a marvel, a perfect statue, with the somewhat long, severe lines on her face.

I then asked, in order to see what she would reply, and also, perhaps, to embarrass her:

"What have you come here for?"

She replied, in her soft, harmonious voice:

"I have come to be altogether at my lord's disposal, and to do whatever he wishes."

She was evidently quite resigned.

I put the same question to the youngest, who answered immediately in her shrill voice:

"I am here to do whatever you ask me, my master."

This one was like a little mouse, and was very taking, just as they all were, so I took her in my arms and kissed her. The others made a movement to go away, thinking, no doubt, that I had made my choice; but I ordered them to stay, and sitting down in the Indian fashion, I made them all sit round me, and began to tell them fairy tales, for I spoke their language fairly well.

They listened attentively, thrilled by the wonderful story, trembling with awe, and making gestures with their hands. Poor little things, they were not thinking any longer of the reason why they were sent to me.

When I had finished my story, I called Latchmân, my confidential servant, and made him bring sweetmeats and cakes, of which they ate enough to make themselves ill; then, as I began to find the adventure rather funny, I organized games to amuse them.

One of these diversions had an enormous success. I made a bridge of my legs, and the six children ran underneath, the smallest beginning and the tallest always knocking against them a little, because she

did not stoop enough. It made them shout with laughter, and these young voices sounding beneath the low vaults of my sumptuous palace seemed to wake it up and to people it with childlike gayety, filling it with life.

Next I took great interest in seeing to the sleeping apartments of my innocent concubines, and in the end I saw them safely locked up under the surveillance of four female servants, whom the prince had sent me at the same time in order to take care of my sultanas.

For a week I took the greatest pleasure in acting the papa toward these living dolls. We had capital games of hide-and-seek, puss-in-the-corner, etc., which gave them the greatest pleasure, for every day I taught them a new game, to their intense delight.

My house now resembled a school, and my little friends, dressed in beautiful silk stuffs and in materials embroidered with gold and silver, ran up and down the long galleries and the quiet rooms like little human animals.

At last, one evening, without my knowing exactly how it happened, the oldest of them, the one called Châli, who looked so like an ivory statue, became my wife.

She was an adorable little creature, timid and gentle, who soon got to love me ardently, with some degree of shame, with hesitation, as if afraid of European justice, with reserve and scruples, and yet with passionate tenderness. I cherished her as if I had been her father.

The others continued to play in the palace like a

lot of happy kittens, and Châli never left me except when I went to the prince.

We passed delicious hours together in the ruins of the old castle, surrounded by the monkeys, who had become our friends.

She used to sit on my knees, turning all sorts of things over in her little sphinx's head, or perhaps not thinking of anything, retaining the beautiful, charming hereditary pose of that noble and dreamy people, the hieratic pose of the sacred statues.

In a large brass dish I had brought provisions, cakes, fruits. The apes came nearer and nearer, followed by their young ones, who were more timid; at last they sat down round us in a circle, without daring to come any nearer, waiting for me to distribute my delicacies. Then, almost invariably, a male more daring than the rest would come to me with outstretched hand, like a beggar, and I would give him something, which he would take to his wife. All the others immediately began to utter furious cries, cries of rage and jealousy, and I could not make the terrible racket cease except by throwing each one a share.

As I was very comfortable in the ruins, I had my instruments brought there, so that I might be able to work. As soon, however, as they saw the copper fittings on my scientific instruments, the monkeys, no doubt taking them for some deadly engines, fled on all sides, uttering the most piercing cries.

I often also spent my evening with Châli on one of the outer galleries that overlooked the lake of Vihara. Without speaking, we looked at the bright moon gliding over the sky and throwing a mantle of trembling silver across the water, and down below,

on the farther shore, the row of small pagodas, like dainty mushrooms with their stalks in the water. Taking the thoughtful little head between my hands, I printed a long, soft kiss on Châli's polished brow, on her great eyes, which were full of the secret of that ancient land of mystery, and on her calm lips, which opened to my caress. I felt a vague, though strongly poetic sensation, a sensation that in this girl I possessed a whole race, that mother race from which all the rest originated.

The prince continued to load me with presents. One day he sent me an object which excited a passionate admiration in Châli. It was merely one of those cardboard boxes covered with shells that can be bought at any European seaside resort for a trifling sum. But there it was a jewel beyond price, and no doubt was the first that had found its way into the kingdom. I put it on a table and left it there, wondering at the value which was set upon this trumpery article out of a bazaar.

But Châli never got tired of looking at it, of admiring it ecstatically. From time to time she would say to me, "May I touch it?" And when I gave her permission, she raised the lid, closed it again with the greatest care, touched the shells very gently, the contact appearing to give her real physical pleasure.

However, my work was now finished and it was time for me to return. I was a long time in making up my mind, detained by tenderness for my little friend, but at last I was obliged to fix the day of departure.

The prince got up fresh hunting excursions and fresh wrestling matches, but after a fortnight of

these pleasures I declared that I could stay no longer, and he gave me my liberty.

My farewell from Châli was heartrending. She cried a long time, with her head on my breast, her little frame shaken with sobs. I did not know how to console her; my kisses were futile.

All at once an idea struck me, and I went and got the shell box, and putting it into her hands, said: "That is for you; it is yours."

Then I saw her first smile. Her whole face was lighted up with an inward joy, that profound joy that comes when apparently impossible dreams are suddenly realized; then she embraced me ardently.

All the same, she wept bitterly when I bade her a last farewell.

I gave paternal kisses and cakes to all the children, and then I left the place.

## II

Two years had passed, when my duties again called me to Bombay; and, because I knew the country and the language well, I was left there to undertake another mission.

I finished what I had to do as quickly as possible, and as I had a considerable amount of spare time on my hands, I determined to go and see my friend the King of Ganhard and my dear little Châli once more, though I expected to find her much changed.

The rajah received me with every demonstration of pleasure, and hardly left me for a moment during the first day of my visit. At night, however, when

I was alone, I sent for Haribadada, and after several irrelevant questions, I said to him:

"Do you know what has become of little Châli, whom the rajah gave me?"

He immediately assumed a sad and troubled look, and said, in evident embarrassment:

"We had better not speak of her."

"Why? She was a dear little woman."

"She turned out badly, sir."

"What — Châli? What has become of her? Where is she?"

"I meant to say that she came to a bad end."

"A bad end! Is she dead?"

"Yes. She committed a very dreadful action."

I was very much distressed. I felt my heart beat, and my breast was oppressed with grief, but I insisted on knowing what she had done and what had happened to her.

The man became more and more embarrassed, and murmured: "You had better not ask about it."

"But I want to know."

"She stole——"

"Who—Châli? What did she steal?"

"Something that belonged to you."

"To me? What do you mean?"

"The day you left she stole that little box which the prince had given you; it was found in her hands."

"What box are you talking about?"

"The box covered with shells."

"But I gave it to her."

The Indian looked at me with stupefaction, then replied: "Well, she declared with the most sacred oaths that you had given it to her, but nobody could

believe that you could have given a king's present to a slave, and so the rajah had her punished."

"How was she punished? What was done to her?"

"She was tied up in a sack, and thrown into the lake from this window, from the window of the room in which we are, where she committed the theft."

I felt the most profound grief that I ever experienced, and I made a sign to Haribadada to go away, so that he might not see my tears; and I spent the night on the gallery that overlooked the lake, on the gallery where I had so often held the poor child on my knees.

I pictured to myself her pretty little body lying decomposed in a sack in the dark waters beneath me, those waters which we had so often looked at together.

The next day I left again, in spite of the rajah's entreaties and evident vexation; and I now still feel as if I had never loved any one but Châli.

# DUCHOUX

BARON DE MORDIANE kept his fur coat unbuttoned as he descended the wide staircase of the club, which was like a hot-house from the heat of the stove, and when he reached the street a shiver ran over him, one of those shivers that come when the system is depressed. For he had lost some money and his digestion had troubled him for some time, so that he could not eat what he enjoyed.

He went back to his own residence; and, suddenly, the thought of his great, empty apartment, of his footman asleep in the ante-chamber, of the dressing-room in which the water was kept warm for his evening toilet on a gas stove, the large, antique, solemn-looking bed like a mortuary couch, caused another chill to penetrate his whole being.

For some years past he had felt weighing down on him that load of solitude which sometimes crushes old bachelors. Formerly, he had been strong, lively, and gay, giving his days to sport and his nights to festive gatherings. Now, he had grown dull, and no longer took pleasure in anything. Exercise fatigued him; suppers and even dinners made him ill; women annoyed him as much as they had formerly amused him.

The monotony of evenings all alike, of always meeting the same friends in the same place, at the

club, of the same game with a good hand and a run of luck, of the same talk on the same topics, of the same witty remarks by the same lips, of the same jokes on the same themes, of the same scandals about the same women, disgusted him so much as to make him feel at times a veritable inclination to commit suicide. He could no longer lead this regular, inane life, so commonplace, so frivolous and so dull at the same time, and he felt a longing for something tranquil, restful, comfortable, without knowing what.

He certainly did not think of getting married, for he did not feel he had sufficient fortitude to submit to that melancholy, conjugal servitude, to that hateful existence of two beings, who, always together, know each other so well that one cannot utter a word which the other would not anticipate, could not make a single movement which would not be foreseen, could not have any thought, desire, or opinion which would not be divined. He considered that a woman was interesting only when you knew her but slightly, when there is something mysterious and unexplored attached to her, when she remains an enigma, hidden behind a veil. Therefore, what he would desire would be a family, without family-life, wherein he might spend only a portion of his existence. But he was also haunted by the recollection of his son.

For the past year, he had been constantly thinking of this, feeling an irritating desire springing up within him to see him, to renew acquaintance with him. He had become the father of this child, while still a young man, in the midst of dramatic and touching incidents. The boy, despatched to the

South, had been brought up near Marseilles without ever hearing his father's name mentioned.

The latter had at first paid for the child from month to month, for his nurture, education and the expense of holidays, and finally had provided an allowance for him on his making a sensible match. A discreet notary had acted as an intermediary, without ever disclosing anything.

The Baron de Mordiane accordingly knew merely that a child of his was living somewhere in the neighborhood of Marseilles, that he was looked upon as intelligent and well-educated, and that he had married the daughter of an architect and contractor to whose business he had succeeded. He was also believed to be wealthy.

Why should he not go and see this unknown son without telling his name, in order to form an opinion about him, and to assure himself whether, in case of necessity, he might find an agreeable refuge in this family?

He had acted handsomely towards the young men, had settled a good fortune on him, which had been thankfully accepted. He was, therefore, certain that he would not find himself clashing against any inordinate sense of self-importance; and this thought, this desire of setting out for the South, which was renewed each day, tantalized him like a kind of irritant. A strange selfish feeling of affection also attracted him as he pictured this pleasant, warm abode by the seaside, where he would meet his young and pretty daughter-in-law, his grandchildren with outstretched arms, and his son who would recall to his memory the charming and short-lived adventure of bygone years. He regretted only having

given so much money, and that this money had prospered in the young man's hands, thus preventing him from any longer presenting himself in the character of a benefactor.

He hurried along with the collar of his fur coat turned up, his mind full of all these thoughts. Suddenly he made up his mind. A cab was passing; he hailed it, drove home, and, when his valet, just roused from a nap, had opened the door, he said:

"Louis, we start to-morrow evening for Marseilles. We will remain there perhaps a fortnight. You will make all the necessary preparations."

The train rushed on past the Rhone with its sandbanks, then through yellow plains, bright villages, and a wide expanse of country, shut in by bare mountains which rose on the distant horizon.

The Baron de Mordiane, waking up after a night spent in a sleeping compartment, looked at himself in a melancholy fashion in the little mirror of his dressing-case. The glaring sun of the South showed him some wrinkles which he had not observed before—a condition of decreptitude unnoticed in the imperfect light of Parisian rooms. He thought, as he examined the corners of his eyes, and saw the wrinkled lids, the temples, the skinny forehead.

"Damn it, I've not merely got the gloss taken off —I've become quite an old fogy."

And his desire for rest suddenly increased, with a vague yearning, born in him for the first time, to take his grandchildren on his knees.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, the baron arrived in a landau which he had hired at Marseilles, at the gate of one of those houses of Southern

France, so dazzlingly white at the end of their avenues of plane-trees, that they almost blind one at first. He smiled as he pursued his way along the avenue leading to the house, and reflected:

"Deuce take it! this is a nice place."

Suddenly, a young rogue of five or six darted out of a shrubbery, and remained standing at the side of the path, staring at the gentleman with eyes wide open.

Mordiane came over to him:

"Good-morning, my boy."

The child made no reply.

The baron, stooping down, took him up in his arms to kiss him, but the smell of garlic with which the child seemed impregnated almost suffocated him and he quickly put him down again on the ground, muttering:

"Oh! it is the gardener's son."

And he proceeded towards the house.

The linen was hanging out to dry on a line before the door—shirts and chemises, napkins, dish-clothes, aprons, and sheets, while a row of socks, hanging from strings one above the other, filled up an entire window, like sausages exposed for sale in front of a pork-butcher's shop.

The baron announced his arrival. A servant girl appeared, a true servant of the South, dirty and untidy, with her hair hanging in wisps over her face, while her petticoat under the accumulation of stains which had soiled it had retained only a certain uncouth remnant of its former color, and might have done for the particolored suit of a clown.

He asked:

"Is M. Duchoux at home?"

## DUCHOUX

He had many years ago, in the mocking spirit of a cynical man of pleasure, given this name to the foundling in order that it might not be forgotten that he had been picked up under a cabbage.

The servant girl asked:

"Do you want M. Duchoux?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is in the big room, drawing some plans."

"Tell him that M. Merlin wishes to speak to him."

She replied, in amazement:

"Hey! go inside then, if you want to see him."

And she bawled out:

"Mosieu Duchouxe—a caller."

The baron entered, and in a spacious apartment, darkened by the half-closed blinds, he indistinctly traced out persons and things, which appeared to him very untidy.

Standing in front of a table laden with articles of every sort, a little bald man was tracing lines on a large sheet of paper.

He interrupted his work, and advanced two steps. His waistcoat left open, his unbuttoned breeches, and turned-up shirt-sleeves, indicated that he felt hot, and his muddy shoes showed that it had been raining hard for some days.

He asked with a very pronounced southern accent:

"Whom have I the honor of——?"

"Monsieur Merlin; I came to consult you about the purchase of a building lot."

"Ha! ha! that is good."

And Duchoux, turning towards his wife, who was knitting in the shade:

"Clear off a chair, Josephine."

Mordiane then saw a young woman, who ap-

peared already old, as women look at twenty-five in the provinces, for want of attention to their persons, lack of regular baths, and all the little cares bestowed on feminine toilet which freshen and preserve, till the age of fifty, the charm and beauty of the sex. With a kerchief over her shoulders, her hair clumsily braided—though lovely hair, thick and black, you could see that it was badly brushed—she stretched out hands like those of a servant, and removed an infant's robe, a knife, a fag-end of packthread, an empty flower-pot, and a greasy plate left on the seat of a chair, which she then moved over towards the visitor.

He sat down, and presently noticed that Duchoux's work-table had on it, in addition to the books and papers, two lettuces recently gathered, a wash-basin, a hair-brush, a towel, a revolver, and a number of cups which had not been washed.

The architect perceived this look, and said with a smile:

"Excuse us! The room is rather untidy—owing to the children."

And he drew over his chair in order to chat with his client.

"So you are looking for a piece of ground in the neighborhood of Marseilles?"

His breath carried towards the baron that odor of garlic which the people of the South exhale as flowers do their perfume.

Mordiane asked:

"Is it your son that I met under the plane-trees?"

"Yes. Yes, the second."

"You have two of them?"

"Three, monsieur, one a year"

And Duchoux looked full of pride.

The baron was thinking to himself:

"If they all have the same perfume, their nursery must be a real conservatory."

He continued:

"Yes, I would like a nice piece of ground near the sea, on a little solitary strip of beach——"

Thereupon Duchoux proceeded to explain. He had ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred, or more, pieces of ground of the kind required, at different prices and suited to different tastes. He talked just as a fountain flows, smiling, self-satisfied, wagging his bald round head.

And Mordiane was reminded of a little woman, fair-haired, slight, with a somewhat melancholy look, and a tender fashion of murmuring, "My darling," the mere remembrance of which made the blood stir in his veins. She had loved him passionately, madly, for three months; then, becoming enceinte in the absence of her husband, who was governor of a colony, she had run away and concealed herself, distracted with despair and terror, till the birth of the child, which Mordiane carried off one summer's evening, and which they had not laid eyes on afterwards.

She died of consumption three years later, in the colony of which her husband was governor, and whither she had gone to join him. And here before him was their son, who was saying in metallic tones, as he rang out his closing words:

"This piece of ground, monsieur, is a rare bargain——"

And Mordiane recalled the other voice, light as the touch of a gentle breeze, as it used to murmur:

"My darling, we shall never part——"

And he remembered the soft, deep, devoted glance in those blue eyes, as he watched the round vacant eyes, though also blue, of this ridiculous little man, who, in spite of all, bore a resemblance to his mother.

Yes, he looked more and more like her every moment—like her in accent, in movement, in his entire deportment—he resembled her, but as an ape does a man. Still he was hers; he displayed a thousand external characteristics peculiar to her, though in an unspeakably distorted, irritating and revolting form.

The baron was galled, haunted as he was all of a sudden by this horrible resemblance, each instant growing stronger, exasperating, maddening torturing him like a nightmare, like a weight of remorse.

He stammered out:

"When can we look at this piece of ground together?"

"Why, to-morrow, if you like."

"Well, yes, to-morrow. At what hour?"

"One o'clock."

"All right."

The child he had met in the avenue appeared before the open door, exclaiming:

"Dada!"

There was no answer.

Mordiane had risen up with a longing to escape, to run off, which made his legs tremble. This "dada" had hit him like a bullet. It was to *him* that it was addressed, it was intended for him, this "dada," smelling of garlic—this "dada" of the South.

Oh! how sweet had been the perfume exhaled by her, his sweetheart of bygone days!

Duchoux saw him to the door.

"This house is your own?" said the baron.

"Yes, monsieur; I bought it recently. And I am proud of it. I am a child of accident, monsieur, and I don't want to hide it. I am proud of it. I owe nothing to anyone; I am the son of my own efforts; I owe everything to myself."

The little boy, who remained on the threshold, kept still exclaiming, though at some distance away from them:

"Dada!"

Mordiane, shaking as with a chill, seized with a panic, fled as one flees from a great danger.

"He is going to guess who I am, to recognize me," he thought. "He is going to take me in his arms, and call out to me, 'Dada' while giving me a kiss perfumed with garlic."

"To-morrow, monsieur."

"To-morrow, at one o'clock."

The landau rolled over the white road.

"Coachman; to the railway-station!"

And he heard two voices, one far-away and sweet, the faint, sad voice of the dead, saying: "My darling," and the other sonorous, sing-song, frightful, bawling out, "Dada," just as people bawl out "Stop him!" when a thief is flying through the street.

Next evening, as he entered the club, the Count d'Etreillis said to him:

"We have not seen you for the last three days. Have you been ill?"

"Yes, a little indisposed. I get these headaches from time to time."

# IN THE SPRING

WITH the first day of spring, when the awakening earth puts on its garment of green, and the warm, fragrant air fans our faces and fills our lungs and appears even to penetrate to our hearts, we experience a vague, undefined longing for freedom, for happiness, a desire to run, to wander aimlessly, to breathe in the spring. The previous winter having been unusually severe, this spring feeling was like a form of intoxication in May, as if there were an overabundant supply of sap.

One morning on waking I saw from my window the blue sky glowing in the sun above the neighboring houses. The canaries hanging in the windows were singing loudly, and so were the servants on every floor; a cheerful noise rose up from the streets, and I went out, my spirits as bright as the day, to go—I did not exactly know where. Everybody I met seemed to be smiling; an air of happiness appeared to pervade everything in the warm light of returning spring. One might almost have said that a breeze of love was blowing through the city, and the sight of the young women whom I saw in the streets in their morning toilets, in the depths of whose eyes there lurked a hidden tenderness, and who walked with languid grace, filled my heart with agitation.

Without knowing how or why, I found myself

on the banks of the Seine. Steamboats were starting for Suresnes, and suddenly I was seized by an unconquerable desire to take a walk through the woods. The deck of the *Mouche* was covered with passengers, for the sun in early spring draws one out of the house, in spite of themselves, and everybody moves about, goes and comes and talks to his neighbor.

I had a girl neighbor, a little work-girl, no doubt, who possessed the true Parisian charm: a little head, with light curly hair, which looked like a shimmer of light as it danced in the wind, came down to her ears, and descended to the nape of her neck, where it became such fine, light-colored down that one could scarcely see it, but felt an irresistible desire to shower kisses on it.

Under my persistent gaze, she turned her head toward me, and then immediately looked down, while a slight crease at the side of her mouth, that was ready to break out into a smile, also showed a fine, silky, pale down which the sun was gilding a little.

The calm river grew wider; the atmosphere was warm and perfectly still, but a murmur of life seemed to fill all space.

My neighbor raised her eyes again, and this time, as I was still looking at her, she smiled decidedly. She was charming, and in her passing glance I saw a thousand things, which I had hitherto been ignorant of, for I perceived unknown depths, all the charm of tenderness, all the poetry which we dream of, all the happiness which we are continually in search of. I felt an insane longing to open my arms and to carry her off somewhere, so as to whisper the sweet music of words of love into her ears.

I was just about to address her when somebody touched me on the shoulder, and as I turned round in some surprise, I saw an ordinary-looking man, who was neither young nor old, and who gazed at me sadly.

"I should like to speak to you," he said.

I made a grimace, which he no doubt saw, for he added:

"It is a matter of importance."

I got up, therefore, and followed him to the other end of the boat and then he said:

"Monsieur, when winter comes, with its cold, wet and snowy weather, your doctor says to you constantly: 'Keep your feet warm, guard against chills, colds, bronchitis, rheumatism and pleurisy.'

"Then you are very careful, you wear flannel, a heavy greatcoat and thick shoes, but all this does not prevent you from passing two months in bed. But when spring returns, with its leaves and flowers, its warm, soft breezes and its smell of the fields, all of which causes you vague disquiet and causeless emotion, nobody says to you:

" 'Monsieur, beware of love! It is lying in ambush everywhere; it is watching for you at every corner; all its snares are laid, all its weapons are sharpened, all its guiles are prepared! Beware of love! Beware of love! It is more dangerous than brandy, bronchitis or pleurisy! It never forgives and makes everybody commit irreparable follies.'

"Yes, monsieur, I say that the French Government ought to put large public notices on the walls, with these words: *'Return of spring. French citizens, beware of love!'* just as they put: *'Beware of paint.'*

"However, as the government will not do this, I must supply its place, and I say to you: 'Beware of love!' for it is just going to seize you, and it is my duty to inform you of it, just as in Russia they inform any one that his nose is frozen."

I was much astonished at this individual, and assuming a dignified manner, I said:

"Really, monsieur, you appear to me to be interfering in a matter which is no concern of yours."

He made an abrupt movement and replied:

"Ah! monsieur, monsieur! If I see that a man is in danger of being drowned at a dangerous spot, ought I to let him perish? So just listen to my story and you will see why I ventured to speak to you like this.

"It was about this time last year that it occurred. But, first of all, I must tell you that I am a clerk in the Admiralty, where our chiefs, the commissioners, take their gold lace as quill-driving officials seriously, and treat us like forecastle men on board a ship. Well, from my office I could see a small bit of blue sky and the swallows, and I felt inclined to dance among my portfolios.

"My yearning for freedom grew so intense that, in spite of my repugnance, I went to see my chief, a short, bad-tempered man, who was always in a rage. When I told him that I was not well, he looked at me and said: 'I do not believe it, monsieur, but be off with you! Do you think that any office can go on with clerks like you?' I started at once and went down the Seine. It was a day like this, and I took the *Mouche,* to go as far as Saint-Cloud. Ah! what a good thing it would have been

if my chief had refused me permission to leave the office that day!

"I seemed to myself to expand in the sun. I loved everything—the steamer, the river, the trees, the houses and my fellow-passengers. I felt inclined to kiss something, no matter what; it was love, laying its snare. Presently, at the Trocadéro, a girl, with a small parcel in her hand, came on board and sat down opposite me. She was decidedly pretty, but it is surprising, monsieur, how much prettier women seem to us when the day is fine at the beginning of the spring. Then they have an intoxicating charm, something quite peculiar about them. It is just like drinking wine after cheese.

"I looked at her and she also looked at me, but only occasionally, as that girl did at you, just now; but at last, by dint of looking at each other constantly, it seemed to me that we knew each other well enough to enter into conversation, and I spoke to her and she replied. She was decidedly pretty and nice and she intoxicated me, monsieur!

"She got out at Saint-Cloud, and I followed her. She went and delivered her parcel, and when she returned the boat had just started. I walked by her side, and the warmth of the air made us both sigh. 'It would be very nice in the woods,' I said. 'Indeed, it would!' she replied. 'Shall we go there for a walk, mademoiselle?'

"She gave me a quick upward look, as if to see exactly what I was like, and then, after a little hesitation, she accepted my proposal, and soon we were there, walking side by side. Under the foliage, which was still rather scanty, the tall, thick, bright green grass was inundated by the sun, and the air

was full of insects that were also making love to one another, and birds were singing in all directions. My companion began to jump and to run, intoxicated by the air and the smell of the country, and I ran and jumped, following her example. How silly we are at times, monsieur!

"Then she sang unrestrainedly a thousand things, opera airs and the song of *Musette!* The song of *Musette!* How poetical it seemed to me, then! I almost cried over it. Ah! Those silly songs make us lose our heads; and, believe me, never marry a woman who sings in the country, especially if she sings the song of *Musette!*

"She soon grew tired, and sat down on a grassy slope, and I sat at her feet and took her hands, her little hands, that were so marked with the needle, and that filled me with emotion. I said to myself: 'These are the sacred marks of toil.' Oh! monsieur, do you know what those sacred marks of toil mean? They mean all the gossip of the workroom, the whispered scandal, the mind soiled by all the filth that is talked; they mean lost chastity, foolish chatter, all the wretchedness of their everyday life, all the narrowness of ideas which belongs to women of the lower orders, combined to their fullest extent in the girl whose fingers bear the sacred marks of toil.

"Then we looked into each other's eyes for a long while. Oh! what power a woman's eye has! How it agitates us, how it invades our very being, takes possession of us, and dominates us! How profound it seems, how full of infinite promises! People call that looking into each other's souls! Oh! monsieur, what humbug! If we could see into each other's souls, we should be more careful of

what we did. However, I was captivated and was crazy about her and tried to take her into my arms, but she said: 'Paws off!' Then I knelt down and opened my heart to her and poured out all the affection that was suffocating me. She seemed surprised at my change of manner and gave me a sidelong glance, as if to say, 'Ah! so that is the way women make a fool of you, old fellow! Very well, we will see.'

"In love, monsieur, we are always novices, and women artful dealers.

"No doubt I could have had her, and I saw my own stupidity later, but what I wanted was not a woman's person, it was love, it was the ideal. I was sentimental, when I ought to have been using my time to a better purpose.

"As soon as she had had enough of my declarations of affection, she got up, and we returned to Saint-Cloud, and I did not leave her until we got to Paris; but she had looked so sad as we were returning, that at last I asked her what was the matter. 'I am thinking,' she replied, 'that this has been one of those days of which we have but few in life.' My heart beat so that it felt as if it would break my ribs.

"I saw her on the following Sunday, and the next Sunday, and every Sunday. I took her to Bougival, Saint-Germain, Maisons-Lafitte, Poissy; to every suburban resort of lovers.

"The little jade, in turn, pretended to love me, until, at last, I altogether lost my head, and three months later I married her.

"What can you expect, monsieur, when a man is a clerk, living alone, without any relations, or any

one to advise him? One says to one's self: 'How sweet life would be with a wife!'

"And so one gets married and she calls you names from morning till night, understands nothing, knows nothing, chatters continually, sings the song of *Musette* at the top of her voice (oh! that song of *Musette,* how tired one gets of it!); quarrels with the charcoal dealer, tells the janitor all her domestic details, confides all the secrets of her bedroom to the neighbor's servant, discusses her husband with the tradespeople and has her head so stuffed with stupid stories, with idiotic superstitions, with extraordinary ideas and monstrous prejudices, that I—for what I have said applies more particularly to myself—shed tears of discouragement every time I talk to her."

He stopped, as he was rather out of breath and very much moved, and I looked at him, for I felt pity for this poor, artless devil, and I was just going to give him some sort of answer, when the boat stopped. We were at Saint-Cloud.

The little woman who had so taken my fancy rose from her seat in order to land. She passed close to me, and gave me a sidelong glance and a furtive smile, one of those smiles that drive you wild. Then she jumped on the landing-stage. I sprang forward to follow her, but my neighbor laid hold of my arm. I shook myself loose, however, whereupon he seized the skirt of my coat and pulled me back, exclaiming: "You shall not go! you shall not go!" in such a loud voice that everybody turned round and laughed, and I remained standing motionless and furious, but without venturing to face scandal and ridicule, and the steamboat started.

The little woman on the landing-stage looked at

me as I went off with an air of disappointment, while my persecutor rubbed his hands and whispered to me:

"You must acknowledge that I have done you a great service."

# OLD JUDAS

THIS entire stretch of country was amazing; it was characterized by a grandeur that was almost religious, and yet it had an air of sinister desolation.

A great, wild lake, filled with stagnant, black water, in which thousands of reeds were waving to and fro, lay in the midst of a vast circle of naked hills, where nothing grew but broom, or here and there an oak curiously twisted by the wind.

Just one house stood on the banks of that dark lake, a small, low house inhabited by Uncle Joseph, an old boatman, who lived on what he could make by his fishing. Once a week he carried the fish he caught into the surrounding villages, returning with the few provisions that he needed for his sustenance.

I went to see this old hermit, who offered to take me with him to his nets, and I accepted.

His boat was old, worm-eaten and clumsy, and the skinny old man rowed with a gentle and monotonous stroke that was soothing to the soul, already oppressed by the sadness of the land round about.

It seemed to me as if I were transported to olden times, in the midst of that ancient country, in that primitive boat, which was propelled by a man of another age.

He took up his nets and threw the fish into the bottom of the boat, as the fishermen of the Bible

might have done. Then he took me down to the end of the lake, where I suddenly perceived a ruin on the other side of the bank, a dilapidated hut, with an enormous red cross on the wall that looked as if it might have been traced with blood, as it gleamed in the last rays of the setting sun.

"What is that?" I asked.

"That is where Judas died," the man replied, crossing himself.

I was not surprised, being almost prepared for this strange answer. Still I asked:

"Judas? What Judas?"

"The Wandering Jew, monsieur," he added.

I asked him to tell me this legend.

But it was better than a legend, being a true story, and quite a recent one, since Uncle Joseph had known the man.

This hut had formerly been occupied by a large woman, a kind of beggar, who lived on public charity.

Uncle Joseph did not remember from whom she had this hut. One evening an old man with a white beard, who seemed to be at least two hundred years old, and who could hardly drag himself along, asked alms of this forlorn woman, as he passed her dwelling.

"Sit down, father," she replied; "everything here belongs to all the world, since it comes from all the world."

He sat down on a stone before the door. He shared the woman's bread, her bed of leaves, and her house.

He did not leave her again, for he had come to the end of his travels.

"It was Our Lady the Virgin who permitted this, monsieur," Joseph added, "it being a woman who had opened her door to a Judas, for this old vagabond was the Wandering Jew. It was not known at first in the country, but the people suspected it very soon, because he was always walking; it had become a sort of second nature to him."

And suspicion had been aroused by still another thing. This woman, who kept that stranger with her, was thought to be a Jewess, for no one had ever seen her at church. For ten miles around no one ever called her anything else but the Jewess.

When the little country children saw her come to beg they cried out:

"Mamma, mamma, here is the Jewess!"

The old man and she began to go out together into the neighboring districts, holding out their hands at all the doors, stammering supplications into the ears of all the passers. They could be seen at all hours of the day, on by-paths, in the villages, or again eating bread, sitting in the noon heat under the shadow of some solitary tree.

And the country people began to call the beggar Old Judas.

One day he brought home in his sack two little live pigs, which a farmer had given him after he had cured the farmer of some sickness.

Soon he stopped begging, and devoted himself entirely to his pigs. He took them out to feed by the lake, or under isolated oaks, or in the near-by valleys. The woman, however, went about all day begging, but she always came back to him in the evening.

He also did not go to church, and no one ever

had seen him cross himself before the wayside crucifixes. All this gave rise to much gossip.

One night his companion was attacked by a fever and began to tremble like a leaf in the wind. He went to the nearest town to get some medicine, and then he shut himself up with her, and was not seen for six days.

The priest, having heard that the "Jewess" was about to die, came to offer the consolation of his religion and administer the last sacrament. Was she a Jewess? He did not know. But in any case, he wished to try to save her soul.

Hardly had he knocked at the door when old Judas appeared on the threshold, breathing hard, his eyes aflame, his long beard agitated, like rippling water, and he hurled blasphemies in an unknown language, extending his skinny arms in order to prevent the priest from entering.

The priest attempted to speak, offered his purse and his aid, but the old man kept on abusing him, making gestures with his hands as if throwing stones at him.

Then the priest retired, followed by the curses of the beggar.

The companion of old Judas died the following day. He buried her himself, in front of his door. They were people of so little account that no one took any interest in them.

Then they saw the man take his pigs out again to the lake and up the hillsides. And he also began begging again to get food. But the people gave him hardly anything, as there was so much gossip about him. Every one knew, moreover, how he had treated the priest.

Then he disappeared. That was during Holy Week, but no one paid any attention to him.

But on Easter Sunday the boys and girls who had gone walking out to the lake heard a great noise in the hut. The door was locked; but the boys broke it in, and the two pigs ran out, jumping like goats. No one ever saw them again.

The whole crowd went in; they saw some old rags on the floor, the beggar's hat, some bones, clots of dried blood and bits of flesh in the hollows of the skull.

His pigs had devoured him.

"This happened on Good Friday, monsieur," Joseph concluded his story, "three hours after noon."

"How do you know that?" I asked him.

"There is no doubt about that," he replied.

I did not attempt to make him understand that it could easily happen that the famished animals had eaten their master, after he had died suddenly in his hut.

As for the cross on the wall, it had appeared one morning, and no one knew what hand traced it in that strange color.

Since then no one doubted any longer that the Wandering Jew had died on this spot.

I myself believed it for one hour.

# MADAME HUSSON'S "ROSIER"

WE had just left Gisors, where I was awakened by hearing the name of the town called out by the guards, and I was dozing off again when a terrific shock threw me forward on top of a large lady who sat opposite me.

One of the wheels of the engine had broken, and the engine itself lay across the track. The tender and the baggage car were also derailed, and lay beside this mutilated engine, which rattled, groaned, hissed, puffed, sputtered, and resembled those horses that fall in the street with their flanks heaving, their breast palpitating, their nostrils steaming and their whole body trembling, but incapable of the slightest effort to rise and start off again.

There were no dead or wounded; only a few with bruises, for the train was not going at full speed. And we looked with sorrow at the great crippled iron creature that could not draw us along any more, and that blocked the track, perhaps for some time, for no doubt they would have to send to Paris for a special train to come to our aid.

It was then ten o'clock in the morning, and I at once decided to go back to Gisors for breakfast.

As I was walking along I said to myself:

"Gisors, Gisors—why, I know someone there!

Who is it? Gisors? Let me see, I have a friend in this town." A name suddenly came to my mind, "Albert Marambot." He was an old school friend whom I had not seen for at least twelve years, and who was practicing medicine in Gisors. He had often written, inviting me to come and see him, and I had always promised to do so, without keeping my word. But at last I would take advantage of this opportunity.

I asked the first passer-by:

"Do you know where Dr. Marambot lives?"

He replied, without hesitation, and with the drawling accent of the Normans:

"Rue Dauphine."

I presently saw, on the door of the house he pointed out, a large brass plate on which was engraved the name of my old chum. I rang the bell, but the servant, a yellow-haired girl who moved slowly, said with a stupid air:

"He isn't here, he isn't here."

I heard a sound of forks and of glasses and I cried:

"Hallo, Marambot!"

A door opened and a large man, with whiskers and a cross look on his face, appeared, carrying a dinner napkin in his hand.

I certainly should not have recognized him. One would have said he was forty-five at least, and, in a second, all the provincial life which makes one grow heavy, dull and old came before me. In a single flash of thought, quicker than the act of extending my hand to him, I could see his life, his manner of existence, his line of thought and his theories of things in general. I guessed at the pro-

longed meals that had rounded out his stomach, his after-dinner naps from the torpor of a slow indigestion aided by cognac, and his vague glances cast on the patient while he thought of the chicken that was roasting before the fire. His conversations about cooking, about cider, brandy and wine, the way of preparing certain dishes and of blending certain sauces were revealed to me at sight of his puffy red cheeks, his heavy lips and his lustreless eyes.

"You do not recognize me. I am Raoul Aubertin," I said.

He opened his arms and gave me such a hug that I thought he would choke me.

"You have not breakfasted, have you?"

"No."

"How fortunate! I was just sitting down to table and I have an excellent trout."

Five minutes later I was sitting opposite him at breakfast. I said:

"Are you a bachelor?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And do you like it here?"

"Time does not hang heavy; I am busy. I have patients and friends. I eat well, have good health, enjoy laughing and shooting. I get along."

"Is not life very monotonous in this little town?"

"No, my dear boy, not when one knows how to fill in the time. A little town, in fact, is like a large one. The incidents and amusements are less varied, but one makes more of them; one has fewer acquaintances, but one meets them more frequently. When you know all the windows in a street, each

one of them interests you and puzzles you more than a whole street in Paris.

"A little town is very amusing, you know, very amusing, very amusing. Why, take Gisors. I know it at the tips of my fingers, from its beginning up to the present time. You have no idea what a queer history it has."

"Do you belong to Gisors?"

"I? No. I come from Gournay, its neighbor and rival. Gournay is to Gisors what Lucullus was to Cicero. Here, everything is for glory; they say 'the proud people of Gisors.' At Gournay, everything is for the stomach; they say 'the chewers of Gournay.' Gisors despises Gournay, but Gournay laughs at Gisors. It is a very comical country, this."

I perceived that I was eating something very delicious, hard-boiled eggs wrapped in a covering of meat jelly flavored with herbs and put on ice for a few moments. I said as I smacked my lips to compliment Marambot:

"That is good."

He smiled.

"Two things are necessary, good jelly, which is hard to get, and good eggs. Oh, how rare good eggs are, with the yolks slightly reddish, and with a good flavor! I have two poultry yards, one for eggs and the other for chickens. I feed my laying hens in a special manner. I have my own ideas on the subject. In an egg, as in the meat of a chicken, in beef, or in mutton, in milk, in everything, one perceives, and ought to taste, the juice, the quintessence of all the food on which the animal has been

fed. How much better food we could have if more attention were paid to this!"

I laughed as I said:

"You are a gourmand?"

"Parbleu. It is only imbeciles who are not. One is a gourmand as one is an artist, as one is learned, as one is a poet. The sense of taste, my friend, is very delicate, capable of perfection, and quite as worthy of respect as the eye and the ear. A person who lacks this sense is deprived of an exquisite faculty, the faculty of discerning the quality of food, just as one may lack the faculty of discerning the beauties of a book or of a work of art; it means to be deprived of an essential organ, of something that belongs to higher humanity; it means to belong to one of those innumerable classes of the infirm, the unfortunate, and the fools of which our race is composed; it means to have the mouth of an animal, in a word, just like the mind of an animal. A man who cannot distinguish one kind of lobster from another; a herring—that admirable fish that has all the flavors, all the odors of the sea—from a mackerel or a whiting; and a Cresane from a Duchess pear, may be compared to a man who should mistake Balzac for Eugene Sue; a symphony of Beethoven for a military march composed by the bandmaster of a regiment; and the Apollo Belvidere for the statue of General de Blaumont.

"Who is General de Blaumont?"

"Oh, that's true, you do not know. It is easy to tell that you do not belong to Gisors. I told you just now, my dear boy, that they called the inhabitants of this town 'the proud people of Gisors,' and never was an epithet better deserved. But let

us finish breakfast first, and then I will tell you about our town and take you to see it."

He stopped talking every now and then while he slowly drank a glass of wine which he gazed at affectionately as he replaced the glass on the table.

It was amusing to see him, with a napkin tied around his neck, his cheeks flushed, his eyes eager, and his whiskers spreading round his mouth as it kept working.

He made me eat until I was almost choking. Then, as I was about to return to the railway station, he seized me by the arm and took me through the streets. The town, of a pretty, provincial type, commanded by its citadel, the most curious monument of military architecture of the seventh century to be found in France, overlooks, in its turn, a long, green valley, where the large Norman cows graze and ruminate in the pastures.

The doctor quoted:

"'Gisors, a town of 4,000 inhabitants in the department of Eure, mentioned in Cæsar's Commentaries: Cæsaris ostium, then Cæsartium, Cæsortium, Gisortium, Gisors.' I shall not take you to visit the old Roman encampment, the remains of which are still in existence."

I laughed and replied:

"My dear friend, it seems to me that you are affected with a special malady that, as a doctor, you ought to study; it is called the spirit of provincialism."

He stopped abruptly.

"The spirit of provincialism, my friend, is nothing but natural patriotism," he said. "I love my house, my town and my province because I discover

in them the customs of my own village; but if I love my country, if I become angry when a neighbor sets foot in it, it is because I feel that my home is in danger, because the frontier that I do not know is the high road to my province. For instance, I am a Norman, a true Norman; well, in spite of my hatred of the German and my desire for revenge, I do not detest them, I do not hate them by instinct as I hate the English, the real, hereditary natural enemy of the Normans; for the English traversed this soil inhabited by my ancestors, plundered and ravaged it twenty times, and my aversion to this perfidious people was transmitted to me at birth by my father. See, here is the statue of the general."

"What general?"

"General Blaumont! We had to have a statue. We are not 'the proud people of Gisors' for nothing! So we discovered General de Blaumont. Look in this bookseller's window."

He drew me towards the bookstore, where about fifteen red, yellow and blue volumes attracted the eye. As I read the titles, I began to laugh idiotically. They read:

*Gisors, its origin, its future,* by M. X. . . ., member of several learned societies; *History of Gisors,* by the Abbé A. . . .; *Gisors, from the time of Cæsar to the present day,* by M. B. . . ., Landowner; *Gisors and its environs,* by Doctor C. D. . . .; *The Glories of Gisors,* by a Discoverer.

"My friend," resumed Marambot, "not a year, not a single year, you understand, passes without a fresh history of Gisors being published here; we now have twenty-three."

"And the glories of Gisors?" I asked.

"Oh, I will not mention them all, only the principal ones. We had first General de Blaumont, then Baron Davillier, the celebrated ceramist who explored Spain and the Balearic Isles, and brought to the notice of collectors the wonderful Hispano-Arabic china. In literature we have a very clever journalist, now dead, Charles Brainne, and among those who are living, the very eminent editor of the *Nouvelliste de Rouen,* Charles Lapièrre . . . and many others, many others."

We were traversing a long street with a gentle incline, with a June sun beating down on it and driving the residents into their houses.

Suddenly there appeared at the farther end of the street a drunken man who was staggering along, with his head forward, his arms and legs limp. He would walk forward rapidly three, six, or ten steps and then stop. When these energetic movements landed him in the middle of the road he stopped short and swayed on his feet, hesitating between falling and a fresh start. Then he would dart off in any direction, sometimes falling against the wall of a house, against which he seemed to be fastened, as though he were trying to get in through the wall. Then he would suddenly turn round and look ahead of him, his mouth open and his eyes blinking in the sunlight, and getting away from the wall by a movement of the hips, he started off once more.

A little yellow dog, a half-starved cur, followed him, barking; stopping when he stopped, and starting off when he started.

"Hallo," said Marambot, "there is Madame Husson's 'Rosier.'"

"Madame Husson's 'Rosier,'" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What do you mean?"

The doctor began to laugh.

"Oh, that is what we call drunkards round here. The name comes from an old story which has now become a legend, although it is true in all respects."

"Is it an amusing story?"

"Very amusing."

"Well, then, tell it to me."

"I will."

There lived formerly in this town a very upright old lady who was a great guardian of morals and was called Mme. Husson. You know, I am telling you the real names and not imaginary ones. Mme. Husson took a special interest in good works, in helping the poor and encouraging the deserving. She was a little woman with a quick walk and wore a black wig. She was ceremonious, polite, on very good terms with the Almighty in the person of Abbé Malon, and had a profound horror, an inborn horror of vice, and, in particular, of the vice the Church calls lasciviousness. Any irregularity before marriage made her furious, exasperated her till she was beside herself.

Now, this was the period when they presented a prize as a reward of virtue to any girl in the environs of Paris who was found to be chaste. She was caled a Rosière, and Mme. Husson got the idea that she would institute a similar ceremony at Gisors. She spoke about it to Abbé Malon, who at once made out a list of candidates.

However, Mme. Husson had a servant, an old woman called Françoise, as upright as her mistress. As soon as the priest had left, madame called the servant and said:

"Here, Françoise, here are the girls whose names M. le curé has submitted to me for the prize of virtue; try and find out what reputation they bear in the district."

And Françoise set out. She collected all the scandal, all the stories, all the tattle, all the suspicions. That she might omit nothing, she wrote it all down together with her memoranda in her housekeeping book, and handed it each morning to Mme. Husson, who, after adjusting her spectacles on her thin nose, read as follows:

Bread..... four sous
Milk..... two sous
Butter..... eight sous
Malvina Levesque got into trouble last year with Mathurin Poilu.
Leg of mutton..... twenty-five sous
Salt..... one sou
Rosalie Vatinel was seen in the Riboudet woods with Cesaire Pienoir, by Mme. Onesime, the ironer, on July the 20th about dusk.
Radishes..... one sou
Vinegar..... two sous
Oxalic acid..... two sous
Josephine Durdent, who is not believed to have committed a fault, although she corresponds with young Oportun, who is in service in Rouen, and who sent her a present of a cap by diligence.

Not one came out unscathed in this rigorous inquisition. Françoise inquired of everyone, neighbors, drapers, the principal, the teaching sisters at school, and gathered the slightest details.

As there is not a girl in the world about whom gossips have not found something to say, there was

not found in all the countryside one young girl whose name was free from some scandal.

But Mme. Husson desired that the "Rosière" of Gisors, like Cæsar's wife, should be above suspicion, and she was horrified, saddened and in despair at the record in her servant's housekeeping account-book.

They then extended their circle of inquiries to the neighboring villages; but with no satisfaction.

They consulted the mayor. His candidates failed. Those of Dr. Barbesol were equally unlucky, in spite of the exactness of his scientific vouchers.

But one morning Françoise, on returning from one of her expeditions, said to her mistress:

"You see, madame, that if you wish to give a prize to anyone, there is only Isidore in all the country round."

Mme. Husson remained thoughtful. She knew him well, this Isidore, the son of Virginie the green-grocer. His proverbial virtue had been the delight of Gisors for several years, and served as an entertaining theme of conversation in the town, and of amusement to the young girls who loved to tease him. He was past twenty-one, was tall, awkward, slow and timid; helped his mother in the business, and spent his days picking over fruit and vegetables, seated on a chair outside the door.

He had an abnormal dread of a petticoat and cast down his eyes whenever a female customer looked at him smilingly, and this well-known timidity made him the butt of all the wags in the country.

Bold words, coarse expressions, indecent allusions, brought the color to his cheeks so quickly that Dr. Barbesol had nicknamed him "the thermometer of

modesty." Was he as innocent as he looked? ill-natured people asked themselves. Was it the mere presentiment of unknown and shameful mysteries or else indignation at the relations ordained as the concomitant of love that so strongly affected the son of Virginie the greengrocer? The urchins of the neighborhood as they ran past the shop would fling disgusting remarks at him just to see him cast down his eyes. The girls amused themselves by walking up and down before him, cracking jokes that made him go into the store. The boldest among them teased him to his face just to have a laugh, to amuse themselves, made appointments with him and proposed all sorts of things.

So Madame Husson had become thoughtful.

Certainly, Isidore was an exceptional case of notorious, unassailable virtue. No one, among the most sceptical, most incredulous, would have been able, would have dared, to suspect Isidore of the slightest infraction of any law of morality. He had never been seen in a café, never been seen at night on the street. He went to bed at eight o'clock and rose at four. He was a perfection, a pearl.

But Mme. Husson still hesitated. The idea of substituting a boy for a girl, a "rosier" for a rosière," troubled her, worried her a little, and she resolved to consult Abbé Malon.

The abbé responded:

"What do you desire to reward, madame? It is virtue, is it not, and nothing but virtue? What does it matter to you, therefore, if it is masculine or feminine? Virtue is eternal; it has neither sex nor country; it is 'Virtue.'"

Thus encouraged, Mme. Husson went to see the mayor.

He approved heartily.

"We will have a fine ceremony," he said. "And another year if we can find a girl as worthy as Isidore we will give the reward to her. It will even be a good example that we shall set to Nanterre. Let us not be exclusive; let us welcome all merit."

Isidore, who had been told about this, blushed deeply and seemed happy.

The ceremony was fixed for the 15th of August, the festival of the Virgin Mary and of the Emperor Napoleon. The municipality had decided to make an imposing ceremony and had built the platform on the couronneaux, a delightful extension of the ramparts of the old citadel where I will take you presently.

With the natural revulsion of public feeling, the virtue of Isidore, ridiculed hitherto, had suddenly become respected and envied, as it would bring him in five hundred francs besides a savings bank book, a mountain of consideration, and glory enough and to spare. The girls now regretted their frivolity, their ridicule, their bold manners; and Isidore, although still modest and timid, had now a little contented air that bespoke his internal satisfaction.

The evening before the 15th of August the entire Rue Dauphine was decorated with flags. Oh, I forgot to tell you why this street had been called Rue Dauphine.

It seems that the wife or mother of the dauphin, I do not remember which one, while visiting Gisors

had been fêted so much by the authorities that during a triumphal procession through the town she stopped before one of the houses in this street, halting the procession, and exclaimed:

"Oh, the pretty house! How I should like to go through it! To whom does it belong?"

They told her the name of the owner, who was sent for and brought, proud and embarrassed, before the princess. She alighted from her carriage, went into the house, wishing to go over it from top to bottom, and even shut herself in one of the rooms alone for a few seconds.

When she came out, the people, flattered at this honor paid to a citizen of Gisors, shouted "Long live the dauphine!" But a rhymester wrote some words to a refrain, and the street retained the title of her royal highness, for

> "The princess, in a hurry,
> Without bell, priest, or beadle,
> But with some water only,
> Had baptized it."

But to come back to Isidore.

They had scattered flowers all along the road as they do for processions at the Fête-Dieu, and the National Guard was present, acting on the orders of their chief, Commandant Desbarres, an old soldier of the Grand Army, who pointed with pride to the beard of a Cossack cut with a single sword stroke from the chin of its owner by the commandant during the retreat in Russia, and which hung beside the frame containing the cross of the Legion of Honor presented to him by the emperor himself.

The regiment that he commanded was, besides, a picked regiment celebrated all through the province, and the company of grenadiers of Gisors was called on to attend all important ceremonies for a distance of fifteen to twenty leagues. The story goes that Louis Philippe, while reviewing the militia of Eure, stopped in astonishment before the company from Gisors, exclaiming:

"Oh, who are those splendid grenadiers?"

"The grenadiers of Gisors," replied the general.

"I might have known it," murmured the king.

So Commandant Desbarres came at the head of his men, preceded by the band, to get Isidore in his mother's store.

After a little air had been played by the band beneath the windows, the "Rosier" himself appeared on the threshold. He was dressed in white duck from head to foot and wore a straw hat with a little bunch of orange blossoms as a cockade.

The question of his clothes had bothered Mme. Husson a good deal, and she hesitated some time between the black coat of those who make their first communion and an entire white suit. But Françoise, her counsellor, induced her to decide on the white suit, pointing out that the Rosier would look like a swan.

Behind him came his guardian, his godmother, Mme. Husson, in triumph. She took his arm to go out of the store, and the mayor placed himself on the other side of the Rosier. The drums beat. Commandant Desbarres gave the order "Present arms!" The procession resumed its march towards the church amid an immense crowd of people who had gathered from the neighboring districts.

After a short mass and an affecting discourse by Abbé Malon, they continued on their way to the couronneaux, where the banquet was served in a tent.

Before taking their seats at table, the mayor gave an address. This is it, word for word. I learned it by heart:

"Young man, a woman of means, beloved by the poor and respected by the rich, Mme. Husson, whom the whole country is thanking here, through me, had the idea, the happy and benevolent idea, of founding in this town a prize for virtue, which should serve as a valuable encouragement to the inhabitants of this beautiful country.

"You, young man, are the first to be rewarded in this dynasty of goodness and chastity. Your name will remain at the head of this list of the most deserving, and your life, understand me, your whole life, must correspond to this happy commencement. To-day, in presence of this noble woman, of these soldier-citizens who have taken up their arms in your honor, in presence of this populace, affected, assembled to applaud you, or, rather, to applaud virtue, in your person, you make a solemn contract with the town, with all of us, to continue until your death the excellent example of your youth.

"Do not forget, young man, that you are the first seed cast into this field of hope; give us the fruits that we expect of you."

The mayor advanced three steps, opened his arms and pressed Isidore to his heart.

The "Rosier" was sobbing without knowing why, from a confused emotion, from pride and a vague and happy feeling of tenderness.

Then the mayor placed in one hand a silk purse in which gold tingled—five hundred francs in gold! —and in his other hand a savings bank book. And he said in a solemn tone:

"Homage, glory and riches to virtue."

Commandant Desbarres shouted "Bravo!" the grenadiers vociferated, and the crowd applauded.

Mme. Husson wiped her eyes, in her turn. Then they all sat down at the table where the banquet was served.

The repast was magnificent and seemed interminable. One course followed another; yellow cider and red wine in fraternal contact blended in the stomach of the guests. The rattle of plates, the sound of voices, and of music softly played, made an incessant deep hum, and was dispersed abroad in the clear sky where the swallows were flying. Mme. Husson occasionally readjusted her black wig, which would slip over on one side, and chatted with Abbé Malon. The mayor, who was excited, talked politics with Commandant Desbarres, and Isidore ate, drank, as if he had never eaten or drunk before. He helped himself repeatedly to all the dishes, becoming aware for the first time of the pleasure of having one's belly full of good things which tickle the palate in the first place. He had let out a reef in his belt and, without speaking, and although he was a little uneasy at a wine stain on his white waistcoat, he ceased eating in order to take up his glass and hold it to his mouth as long as possible, to enjoy the taste slowly.

It was time for the toasts. They were many and loudly applauded. Evening was approaching and they had been at the table since noon. Fine, milky

vapors were already floating in the air in the valley, the light nightrobe of streams and meadows; the sun neared the horizon; the cows were lowing in the distance amid the mists of the pasture. The feast was over. They returned to Gisors. The procession, now disbanded, walked in detachments. Mme. Husson had taken Isidore's arm and was giving him a quantity of urgent, excellent advice.

They stopped at the door of the fruit store, and the "Rosier" was left at his mother's house. She had not come home yet. Having been invited by her family to celebrate her son's triumph, she had taken luncheon with her sister after having followed the procession as far as the banqueting tent.

So Isidore remained alone in the store, which was growing dark. He sat down on a chair, excited by the wine and by pride, and looked about him. Carrots, cabbages, and onions gave out their strong odor of vegetables in the closed room, that coarse smell of the garden blended with the sweet, penetrating odor of strawberries and the delicate, slight, evanescent fragrance of a basket of peaches.

The "Rosier" took one of these and ate it, although he was as full as an egg. Then, all at once, wild with joy, he began to dance about the store, and something rattled in his waistcoat.

He was surprised, and put his hand in his pocket and brought out the purse containing the five hundred francs, which he had forgotten in his agitation. Five hundred francs! What a fortune! He poured the gold pieces out on the counter and spread them out with his big hand with a slow, caressing touch so as to see them all at the same time. There were twenty-five, twenty-five round

gold pieces, all gold! They glistened on the wood in the dim light and he counted them over and over, one by one. Then he put them back in the purse, which he replaced in his pocket.

Who will ever know or who can tell what a terrible conflict took place in the soul of the "Rosier" between good and evil, the tumultuous attack of Satan, his artifices, the temptations which he offered to this timid virgin heart? What suggestions, what imaginations, what desires were not invented by the evil one to excite and destroy this chosen one? He seized his hat, Mme. Husson's saint, his hat, which still bore the little bunch of orange blossoms, and going out through the alley at the back of the house, he disappeared in the darkness.

Virginie, the fruiterer, on learning that her son had returned, went home at once, and found the house empty. She waited, without thinking anything about it at first; but at the end of a quarter of an hour she made inquiries. The neighbors had seen Isidore come home and had not seen him go out again. They began to look for him, but could not find him. His mother, in alarm, went to the mayor. The mayor knew nothing, except that he had left him at the door of his home. Mme. Husson had just retired when they informed her that her protégé had disappeared. She immediately put on her wig, dressed herself and went to Virginie's house. Virginie, whose plebeian soul was readily moved, was weeping copiously amid her cabbages, carrots and onions.

They feared some accident had befallen him. What could it be? Commandant Desbarres notified the police, who made a circuit of the town, and on

the high road to Pontoise they found the little bunch of orange blossoms. It was placed on a table around which the authorities were deliberating. The "Rosier" must have been the victim of some stratagem, some trick, some jealousy; but in what way? What means had been employed to kidnap this innocent creature, and with what object?

Weary of looking for him without any result, Virginie, alone, remained watching and weeping.

The following evening, when the coach passed by on its return from Paris, Gisors learned with astonishment that its "Rosier" had stopped the vehicle at a distance of about two hundred metres from the town, had climbed up on it and paid his fare, handing over a gold piece and receiving the change, and that he had quietly alighted in the centre of the great city.

There was great excitement all through the countryside. Letters passed between the mayor and the chief of police in Paris, but brought no result.

The days followed one another, a week passed.

Now, one morning, Dr. Barbesol, who had gone out early, perceived, sitting on a doorstep, a man dressed in a grimy linen suit, who was sleeping with his head leaning against the wall. He approached him and recognized Isidore. He tried to rouse him, but did not succeed in doing so. The ex-"Rosier" was in that profound, invincible sleep that is alarming, and the doctor, in surprise, went to seek assistance to help him in carrying the young man to Boncheval's drugstore. When they lifted him up they found an empty bottle under him, and when the doctor sniffed at it, he declared that it had contained brandy. That gave a suggestion as

to what treatment he would require. They succeeded in rousing him.

Isidore was drunk, drunk and degraded by a week of guzzling, drunk and so disgusting that a ragman would not have touched him. His beautiful white duck suit was a gray rag, greasy, muddy, torn, and destroyed, and he smelt of the gutter and of vice.

He was washed, sermonized, shut up, and did not leave the house for four days. He seemed ashamed and repentant. They could not find on him either his purse, containing the five hundred francs, or the bankbook, or even his silver watch, a sacred heirloom left by his father, the fruiterer.

On the fifth day he ventured into the Rue Dauphine. Curious glances followed him and he walked along with a furtive expression in his eyes and his head bent down. As he got outside the town towards the valley they lost sight of him; but two hours later he returned laughing and rolling against the walls. He was drunk, absolutely drunk.

Nothing could cure him.

Driven from home by his mother, he became a wagon driver, and drove the charcoal wagons for the Pougrisel firm, which is still in existence.

His reputation as a drunkard became so well known and spread so far that even at Evreux they talked of Mme. Husson's "Rosier," and the sots of the countryside have been given that nickname.

A good deed is never lost.

Dr. Marambot rubbed his hands as he finished his story. I asked:

"Did you know the 'Rosier' ?"

"Yes. I had the honor of closing his eyes."

"What did he die of?"

"An attack of delirium tremens, of course."

We had arrived at the old citadel, a pile of ruined walls dominated by the enormous tower of St. Thomas of Canterbury and the one called the Prisoner's Tower.

Marambot told me the story of this prisoner, who, with the aid of a nail, covered the walls of his dungeon with sculptures, tracing the reflections of the sun as it glanced through the narrow slit of a loophole.

I also learned that Clothaire II had given the patrimony of Gisors to his cousin, Saint Romain, bishop of Rouen; that Gisors ceased to be the capital of the whole of Vexin after the treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte; that the town is the chief strategic centre of all that portion of France, and that in consequence of this advantage she was taken and retaken over and over again. At the command of William the Red, the eminent engineer, Robert de Bellesme, constructed there a powerful fortress that was attacked later by Louis le Gros, then by the Norman barons, was defended by Robert de Candos, was finally ceded to Louis le Gros by Geoffry Plantagenet, was retaken by the English in consequence of the treachery of the Knights-Templars, was contested by Philippe-Augustus and Richard the Lion-hearted, was set on fire by Edward III of England, who could not take the castle, was again taken by the English in 1419, restored later to Charles VIII by Richard de Marbury, was taken by the Duke of Calabria, occupied by the League, inhabited by Henry IV, etc., etc.

And Marambot, eager and almost eloquent, continued:

"What beggars, those English! And what sots, my boy; they are all 'Rosiers,' those hypocrites!"

Then, after a silence, stretching out his arm towards the tiny river that glistened in the meadows, he said:

"Did you know that Henry Monnier was one of the most untiring fishermen on the banks of the Epte?"

"No, I did not know it."

"And Bouffé, my boy, Bouffé was a painter on glass."

"You are joking!"

"No, indeed. How is it you do not know these things?"

# OLD AMABLE

## PART I

THE humid, gray sky seemed to weigh down on the vast brown plain. The odor of autumn, the sad odor of bare, moist lands, of fallen leaves, of dead grass made the stagnant evening air more thick and heavy. The peasants were still at work, scattered through the fields, waiting for the stroke of the Angelus to call them back to the farm-houses, whose thatched roofs were visible here and there through the branches of the leafless trees which protected the apple-gardens against the wind.

At the side of the road, on a heap of clothes, a very small boy seated with his legs apart was playing with a potato, which he now and then let fall on his dress, whilst five women were bending down planting slips of colza in the adjoining plain. With a slow, continuous movement, all along the mounds of earth which the plough had just turned up, they drove in sharp wooden stakes and in the hole thus formed placed the plant, already a little withered, which sank on one side; then they patted down the earth and went on with their work.

A man who was passing, with a whip in his hand, and wearing wooden shoes, stopped near the child, took it up and kissed it. Then one of the women rose up and came across to him. She was a big, red-

haired girl, with large hips, waist and shoulders, a tall Norman woman, with yellow hair in which there was a blood-red tint.

She said in a resolute voice:

"Why, here you are, Césaire—well?"

The man, a thin young fellow with a melancholy air, murmured:

"Well, nothing at all—always the same thing."

"He won't have it?"

"He won't have it."

"What are you going to do?"

"What do you say I ought to do?"

"Go see the curé."

"I will."

"Go at once!"

"I will."

And they stared at each other. He held the child in his arms all the time. He kissed it once more and then put it down again on the woman's clothes.

In the distance, between two farm-houses, could be seen a plough drawn by a horse and driven by a man. They moved on very gently, the horse, the plough and the laborer, in the dim evening twilight.

The woman went on:

"What did your father say?"

"He said he would not have it."

"Why wouldn't he have it?"

The young man pointed toward the child whom he had just put back on the ground, then with a glance he drew her attention to the man drawing the plough yonder there.

And he said emphatically:

"Because 'tis his—this child of yours."

The girl shrugged her shoulders and in an angry tone said:

"Faith, every one knows it well—that it is Victor's. And what about it after all? I made a slip. Am I the only woman that did? My mother also made a slip before me, and then yours did the same before she married your dad! Who is it that hasn't made a slip in the country? I was angry with Victor because he used to tease me while I was asleep in the barn, it's true, and afterward tormented me when I wasn't asleep. I certainly would have married him if he weren't a servant man. Am I a worse woman for that?"

The man said simply:

"As for me, I like you just as you are, with or without the child. It's only my father that opposes me. All the same, I'll see about settling the business."

She answered:

"Go to the curé at once."

"I'm going to him."

And he set forth with his heavy peasant's tread, while the girl, with her hands on her hips, turned round to plant her colza.

In fact, the man who thus went off, Césaire Houlbrèque, the son of deaf old Amable Houlbrèque, wanted to marry, in spite of his father, Céleste Lévesque, who had a child by Victor Lecoq, a mere laborer on her parents' farm, who had been turned out of doors for this act.

The hierarchy of caste, however, does not exist in the country, and if the laborer is thrifty, he becomes, by taking a farm in his turn, the equal of his former master.

So Césaire Houlbrèque went off, his whip under his arm, brooding over his own thoughts and lifting up one after the other his heavy wooden shoes daubed with clay. Certainly he desired to marry Céleste Lévesque. He wanted her with her child because she was the wife he wanted. He could not say why, but he knew it, he was sure of it. He had only to look at her to be convinced of it, to feel quite queer, quite stirred up, simply stupid with happiness. He even found a pleasure in kissing the little boy, Victor's little boy, because he belonged to her.

And he gazed, without hate, at the distant outline of the man who was driving his plough along the horizon.

But old Amable did not want this marriage. He opposed it with the obstinacy of a deaf man, with a violent obstinacy.

Césaire in vain shouted in his ear, in that ear which still heard a few sounds:

"I'll take good care of you, daddy. I tell you she's a good girl and strong, too, and also thrifty."

The old man repeated:

"As long as I live I won't see her your wife."

And nothing could get the better of him, nothing could make him waver. One hope only was left to Césaire. Old Amable was afraid of the curé through the apprehension of death which he felt drawing nigh. he had not much fear of God, nor of the Devil, nor of Hell, nor of Purgatory, of which he had no conception, but he dreaded the priest, who represented to him burial, as one might fear the doctors through horror of diseases. For the last eight days Céleste, who knew this weakness of the old man, had been urging Césaire to go and find the

curé, but Césaire always hesitated, because he had not much liking for the black robe, which represented to him hands always stretched out for collections or for blessed bread.

However, he had made up his mind, and he proceeded toward the presbytery, thinking in what manner he would speak about his case.

The Abbé Raffin, a lively little priest, thin and never shaved, was awaiting his dinner-hour while warming his feet at his kitchen fire.

As soon as he saw the peasant entering he asked, merely turning his head:

"Well, Césaire, what do you want?"

"I'd like to have a talk with you, M. le Curé."

The man remained standing, intimidated, holding his cap in one hand and his whip in the other.

"Well, talk."

Césaire looked at the housekeeper, an old woman who dragged her feet while putting on the cover for her master's dinner at the corner of the table in front of the window.

He stammered:

"'Tis—'tis a sort of confession."

Thereupon the Abbé Raffin carefully surveyed his peasant. He saw his confused countenance, his air of constraint, his wandering eyes, and he gave orders to the housekeeper in these words:

"Marie, go away for five minutes to your room, while I talk to Césaire."

The servant cast on the man an angry glance and went away grumbling.

The clergyman went on:

"Come, now, tell your story."

The young fellow still hesitated, looked down at

his wooden shoes, moved about his cap, then, all of a sudden, he made up his mind:

"Here it is: I want to marry Céleste Lévesque."

"Well, my boy, what's there to prevent you?"

"The father won't have it."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my father."

"What does your father say?"

"He says she has a child."

"She's not the first to whom that happened, since our Mother Eve."

"A child by Victor Lecoq, Anthime Loisel's servant man."

"Ha! ha! So he won't have it?"

"He won't have it."

"What! not at all?"

"No, no more than an ass that won't budge an inch, saving your presence."

"What do you say to him yourself in order to make him decide?"

"I say to him that she's a good girl, and strong, too, and thrifty also."

"And this does not make him agree to it. So you want me to speak to him?"

"Exactly. You speak to him."

"And what am I to tell your father?"

"Why, what you tell people in your sermons to make them give you sous."

In the peasant's mind every effort of religion consisted in loosening the purse strings, in emptying the pockets of men in order to fill the heavenly coffer. It was a kind of huge commercial establishment, of which the curés were the clerks, sly, crafty clerks,

sharp as any one must be who does business for the good God at the expense of the country people.

He knew full well that the priests rendered services, great services to the poorest, to the sick and dying, that they assisted, consoled, counselled, sustained, but all this by means of money, in exchange for white pieces, for beautiful glittering coins, with which they paid for sacraments and masses, advice and protection, pardon of sins and indulgences, purgatory and paradise according to the yearly income and the generosity of the sinner.

The Abbé Raffin, who knew his man and who never lost his temper, burst out laughing.

"Well, yes, I'll tell your father my little story; but you, my lad, you'll come to church."

Houlbrèque extended his hand in order to give a solemn assurance:

"On the word of a poor man, if you do this for me, I promise that I will."

"Come, that's all right. When do you wish me to go and find your father?"

"Why, the sooner the better—to-night, if you can."

"In half an hour, then, after supper."

"In half an hour."

"That's understood. So long, my lad."

"Good-by till we meet again, Monsieur le Curé; many thanks."

"Not at all, my lad."

And Césaire Houlbrèque returned home, his heart relieved of a great weight.

He held on lease a little farm, quite small, for they were not rich, his father and he. Alone with a female servant, a little girl of fifteen, who made the soup, looked after the fowls, milked the cows and

churned the butter, they lived frugally, though Césaire was a good cultivator. But they did not possess either sufficient lands or sufficient cattle to earn more than the indispensable.

The old man no longer worked. Sad, like all deaf people, crippled with pains, bent double, twisted, he went through the fields leaning on his stick, watching the animals and the men with a hard, distrustful eye. Sometimes he sat down on the side of the road and remained there without moving for hours, vaguely pondering over the things that had engrossed his whole life, the price of eggs and corn, the sun and the rain which spoil the crops or make them grow. And, worn out with rheumatism, his old limbs still drank in the humidity of the soul, as they had drunk in for the past sixty years, the moisture of the walls of his low house thatched with damp straw.

He came back at the close of the day, took his place at the end of the table in the kitchen and when the earthen bowl containing the soup had been placed before him he placed round it his crooked fingers, which seemed to have kept the round form of the bowl and, winter and summer, he warmed his hands, before commencing to eat, so as to lose nothing, not even a particle of the heat that came from the fire, which costs a great deal, neither one drop of soup into which fat and salt have to be put, nor one morsel of bread, which comes from the wheat.

Then he climbed up a ladder into a loft, where he had his straw-bed, while his son slept below stairs at the end of a kind of niche near the chimneypiece and the servant shut herself up in a kind of cellar, a black hole which was formerly used to store the potatoes.

Césaire and his father scarcely ever talked to each other. From time to time only, when there was a question of selling a crop or buying a calf, the young man would ask his father's advice, and, making a speaking-trumpet of his two hands, he would bawl out his views into his ear, and old Amable either approved of them or opposed them in a slow, hollow voice that came from the depths of his stomach.

So one evening Césaire, approaching him as if about to discuss the purchase of a horse or a heifer, communicated to him at the top of his voice his intention to marry Céleste Lévesque.

Then the father got angry. Why? On the score of morality? No, certainly. The virtue of a girl is of slight importance in the country. But his avarice, his deep, fierce instinct for saving, revolted at the idea that his son should bring up a child which he had not begotten himself. He had thought suddenly, in one second, of the soup the little fellow would swallow before becoming useful on the farm. He had calculated all the pounds of bread, all the pints of cider that this brat would consume up to his fourteenth year, and a mad anger broke loose from him against Césaire, who had not bestowed a thought on all this.

He replied in an unusually strong voice:

"Have you lost your senses?"

Thereupon Césaire began to enumerate his reasons, to speak about Céleste's good qualities, to prove that she would be worth a thousand times what the child would cost. But the old man doubted these advantages, while he could have no doubts as to the child's existence; and he replied with em-

phatic repetition, without giving any further explanation:

"I will not have it! I will not have it! As long as I live, this won't be done!"

And at this point they had remained for the last three months, without one or the other giving in, resuming at least once a week the same discussion, with the same arguments, the same words, the same gestures and the same fruitlessness.

It was then that Céleste had advised Césaire to go and ask for the curé's assistance.

On arriving home the peasant found his father already seated at table, for he came late through his visit to the presbytery.

They dined in silence, face to face, ate a little bread and butter after the soup and drank a glass of cider. Then they remained motionless in their chairs, with scarcely a glimmer of light, the little servant girl having carried off the candle in order to wash the spoons, wipe the glasses and cut the crusts of bread to be ready for next morning's breakfast.

There was a knock at the door, which was immediately opened, and the priest appeared. The old man raised toward him an anxious eye full of suspicion, and, foreseeing danger, he was getting ready to climb up his ladder when the Abbé Raffin laid his hand on his shoulder and shouted close to his temple:

"I want to have a talk with you, Father Amable."

Césaire had disappeared, taking advantage of the door being open. He did not want to listen, for he was afraid and did not want his hopes to crumble slowly with each obstinate refusal of his father. He

preferred to learn the truth at once, good or bad, later on; and he went out into the night. It was a moonless, starless night, one of those misty nights when the air seems thick with humidity. A vague odor of apples floated through the farmyard, for it was the season when the earliest applies were gathered, the "early ripe," as they are called in the cider country. As Césaire passed along by the cattle-sheds the warm smell of living beasts asleep on manure was exhaled through the narrow windows, and he heard the stamping of the horses, who were standing at the end of the stable, and the sound of their jaws tearing and munching the hay on the racks.

He went straight ahead, thinking about Céleste. In this simple nature, whose ideas were scarcely more than images generated directly by objects, thoughts of love only formulated themselves by calling up before the mind the picture of a big red-haired girl standing in a hollow road and laughing, with her hands on her hips.

It was thus he saw her on the day when he first took a fancy for her. He had, however, known her from infancy, but never had he been so struck by her as on that morning. They had stopped to talk for a few minutes and then he went away, and as he walked along he kept repeating:

"Faith, she's a fine girl, all the same. 'Tis a pity she made a slip with Victor."

Till evening he kept thinking of her and also on the following morning.

When he saw her again he felt something tickling the end of his throat, as if a cock's feather had been driven through his mouth into his chest, and since

then, every time he found himself near her, he was astonished at this nervous tickling which always commenced again.

In three months he made up his mind to marry her, so much did she please him. He could not have said whence came this power over him, but he explained it in these words:

"I am possessed by her," as if the desire for this girl within him were as dominating as one of the powers of hell. He scarcely bothered himself about her transgression. It was a pity, but, after all, it did her no harm, and he bore no grudge against Victor Lecoq.

But if the curé should not succeeed, what was he to do? He did not dare to think of it, the anxiety was such a torture to him.

He reached the presbytery and seated himself near the little gateway to wait for the priest's return.

He was there perhaps half an hour when he heard steps on the road, and although the night was very dark, he presently distinguished the still darker shadow of the cassock.

He rose up, his legs giving way under him, not even venturing to speak, not daring to ask a question.

The clergyman perceived him and said gaily:

"Well, my lad, it's all right."

Césaire stammered:

"All right, 'tisn't possible."

"Yes, my lad, but not without trouble. What an old ass your father is!"

The peasant repeated:

"'Tisn't possible!"

"Why, yes. Come and look me up to-morrow at

midday in order to settle about the publication of the banns."

The young man seized the curé's hand. He pressed it, shook it, bruised it as he stammered:

"True—true—true, Monsieur le Curé, on the word of an honest man, you'll see me to-morrow—at your sermon."

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## PART II

The wedding took place in the middle of December. It was simple, the bridal pair not being rich. Césaire, attired in new clothes, was ready since eight o'clock in the morning to go and fetch his betrothed and bring her to the mayor's office, but it was too early. He seated himself before the kitchen table and waited for the members of the family and the friends who were to accompany him.

For the last eight days it had been snowing, and the brown earth, the earth already fertilized by the autumn sowing, had become a dead white, sleeping under a great sheet of ice.

It was cold in the thatched houses adorned with white caps, and the round apples in the trees of the enclosures seemed to be flowering, covered with white as they had been in the pleasant month of their blossoming.

This day the big clouds to the north, the big great snow clouds, had disappeared and the blue sky showed itself above the white earth on which the rising sun cast silvery reflections.

Césaire looked straight before him through the window, thinking of nothing, quite happy.

The door opened, two women entered, peasant women in their Sunday clothes, the aunt and the cousin of the bridegroom; then three men, his cousins; then a woman who was a neighbor. They sat down on chairs and remained, motionless and silent, the women on one side of the kitchen, the men on the other, suddenly seized with timidity, with that embarrassed sadness which takes possession of people assembled for a ceremony. One of the cousins soon asked:

"Is it not the hour?"

Césaire replied:

"I am much afraid it is."

"Come on! Let us start," said another.

Those rose up. Then Césaire, whom a feeling of uneasiness had taken possession of, climbed up the ladder of the loft to see whether his father was ready. The old man, always as a rule an early riser, had not yet made his appearance. His son found him on his bed of straw, wrapped up in his blanket, with his eyes open and a malicious gleam in them.

He bawled into his ear: "Come, daddy, get up. It's time for the wedding."

The deaf man murmured in a doleful tone:

"I can't get up. I have a sort of chill over me that freezes my back. I can't stir."

The young man, dumbfounded, stared at him, guessing that this was a dodge.

"Come, daddy; you must make an effort."

"I can't do it."

"Look here! I'll help you."

And he stooped toward the old man, pulled off his blanket, caught him by the arm and lifted him up. But old Amable began to whine:

"Ooh! ooh! ooh! What suffering! Ooh! I can't. My back is stiffened up. The cold wind must have rushed in through this cursed roof."

"Well, you'll get no dinner, as I'm having a spread at Polyte's inn. This will teach you what comes of acting mulishly."

And he hurried down the ladder and started out, accompanied by his relatives and guests.

The men had turned up the bottoms of their trousers so as not to get them wet in the snow. The women held up their petticoats and showed their lean ankles with gray woollen stockings and their bony shanks resembling broomsticks. And they all moved forward with a swinging gait, one behind the other, without uttering a word, moving cautiously, for fear of losing the road which was hidden beneath the flat, uniform, uninterrupted stretch of snow.

As they approached the farmhouses they saw one or two persons waiting to join them, and the procession went on without stopping and wound its way forward, following the invisible outlines of the road, so that it resembled a living chaplet of black beads undulating through the white countryside.

In front of the bride's door a large group was stamping up and down the open space awaiting the bridegroom. When he appeared they gave him a loud greeting, and presently Céleste came forth from her room, clad in a blue dress, her shoulders covered with a small red shawl and her head adorned with orange flowers.

But every one asked Césaire:

"Where's your father?"

He replied with embarrassment:

"He couldn't move on account of the pains."

And the farmers tossed their heads with a sly, incredulous air.

They directed their steps toward the mayor's office. Behind the pair about to be wedded a peasant woman carried Victor's child, as if it were going to be baptized; and the men, in pairs now, with arms linked, walked through the snow with the movements of a sloop at sea.

After having been united by the mayor in the little municipal house the pair were made one by the curé, in his turn, in the modest house of God. He blessed their union by promising them fruitfulness, then he preached to them on the matrimonial virtues, the simple and healthful virtues of the country, work, concord and fidelity, while the child, who was cold, began to fret behind the bride.

As soon as the couple reappeared on the threshold of the church shots were discharged from the ditch of the cemetery. Only the barrels of the guns could be seen whence came forth rapid jets of smoke; then a head could be seen gazing at the procession. It was Victor Lecoq celebrating the marriage of his old sweetheart, wishing her happiness and sending her his good wishes with explosions of powder. He had employed some friends of his, five or six laboring men, for these salvos of musketry. It was considered a nice attention.

The repast was given in Polyte Cacheprune's inn. Twenty covers were laid in the great hall where people dined on market days, and the big leg of mutton turning before the spit, the fowls browned under their own gravy, the chitterlings sputtering over the bright, clear fire filled the house with a thick odor of

live coal sprinkled with fat—the powerful, heavy odor of rustic fare.

They sat down to table at midday and the soup was poured at once into the plates. All faces had already brightened up; mouths opened to utter loud jokes and eyes were laughing with knowing winks. They were going to amuse themselves and no mistake.

The door opened, and old Amable appeared. He seemed in a bad humor and his face wore a scowl as he dragged himself forward on his sticks, whining at every step to indicate his suffering. As soon as they saw him they stopped talking, but suddenly his neighbor, Daddy Malivoire, a big joker, who knew all the little tricks and ways of people, began to yell, just as Césaire used to do, by making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

"Hallo, my cute old boy, you have a good nose on you to be able to smell Polyte's cookery from your own house!"

A roar of laughter burst forth from the throats of those present. Malivoire, excited by his success, went on:

"There's nothing for the rheumatics like a chitterling poultice! It keeps your belly warm, along with a glass of three-six!"

The men uttered shouts, banged the table with their fists, laughed, bending on one side and raising up their bodies again as if they were working a pump. The women clucked like hens, while the servants wriggled, standing against the walls. Old Amable was the only one that did not laugh, and, without making any reply, waited till they made room for him.

They found a place for him in the middle of the table, facing his daughter-in-law, and, as soon as he was seated, he began to eat. It was his son who was paying, after all; it was right he should take his share. With each ladleful of soup that went into his stomach, with each mouthful of bread or meat crushed between his gums, with each glass of cider or wine that flowed through his gullet he thought he was regaining something of his own property, getting back a little of his money which all those gluttons were devouring, saving in fact a portion of his own means. And he ate in silence with the obstinacy of a miser who hides his coppers, with the same gloomy persistence with which he formerly performed his daily labors.

But all of a sudden he noticed at the end of the table Céleste's child on a woman's lap, and his eye remained fixed on the little boy. He went on eating, with his glance riveted on the youngster, into whose mouth the woman who minded him every now and then put a little morsel which he nibbled at. And the old man suffered more from the few mouthfuls sucked by this little chap than from all that the others swallowed.

The meal lasted till evening. Then every one went back home.

Césaire raised up old Amable.

"Come, daddy, we must go home," said he.

And he put the old man's two sticks in his hands.

Céleste took her child in her arms, and they went on slowly through the pale night whitened by the snow. The deaf old man, three-fourths tipsy, and even more malicious under the influence of drink, refused to go forward. Several times he even sat

down with the object of making his daughter-in-law catch cold, and he kept whining, without uttering a word, giving vent to a sort of continuous groaning as if he were in pain.

When they reached home he at once climbed up to his loft, while Césaire made a bed for the child near the deep niche where he was going to lie down with his wife. But as the newly wedded pair could not sleep immediately, they heard the old man for a long time moving about on his bed of straw, and he even talked aloud several times, whether it was that he was dreaming or that he let his thoughts escape through his mouth, in spite of himself, not being able to keep them back, under the obsession of a fixed idea.

When he came down his ladder next morning he saw his daughter-in-law looking after the housekeeping.

She cried out to him:

"Come, daddy, hurry on! Here's some good soup."

And she placed at the end of the table the round black earthen bowl filled with steaming liquid. He sat down without giving any answer, seized the hot bowl, warmed his hands with it in his customary fashion, and, as it was very cold, even pressed it against his breast to try to make a little of the living heat of the boiling liquid enter into him, into his old body stiffened by so many winters.

Then he took his sticks and went out into the fields, covered with ice, till it was time for dinner, for he had seen Céleste's youngster still asleep in a big soap-box.

He did not take his place in the household. He

lived in the thatched house, as in bygone days, but he seemed not to belong to it any longer, to be no longer interested in anything, to look upon those people, his son, the wife and the child as strangers whom he did not know, to whom he never spoke.

The winter glided by. It was long and severe.

Then the early spring made the seeds sprout forth again, and the peasants once more, like laborious ants, passed their days in the fields, toiling from morning till night, under the wind and under the rain, along the furrows of brown earth which brought forth the bread of men.

The year promised well for the newly married pair. The crops grew thick and strong. There were no late frosts, and the apples bursting into bloom scattered on the grass their rosy white snow which promised a hail of fruit for the autumn.

Césaire toiled hard, rose early and left off work late, in order to save the expense of a hired man.

His wife said to him sometimes:

"You'll make yourself ill in the long run."

He replied:

"Certainly not. I'm a good judge."

Nevertheless one evening he came home so fatigued that he had to get to bed without supper. He rose up next morning at the usual hour, but he could not eat, in spite of his fast on the previous night, and he had to come back to the house in the middle of the afternoon in order to go to bed again. In the course of the night he began to cough; he turned round on his straw couch, feverish, with his forehead burning, his tongue dry and his throat parched by a burning thirst.

However, at daybreak he went toward his grounds,

but next morning the doctor had to be sent for and pronounced him very ill with inflammation of the lungs.

And he no longer left the dark recess in which he slept. He could be heard coughing, gasping and tossing about in this hole. In order to see him, to give his medicine and to apply cupping-glasses they had to bring a candle to the entrance. Then one could see his narrow head with his long matted beard underneath a thick lacework of spiders' webs, which hung and floated when stirred by the air. And the hands of the sick man seemed dead under the dingy sheets.

Céleste watched him with restless activity, made him take physic, applied blisters to him, went back and forth in the house, while old Amable remained at the edge of his loft, watching at a distance the gloomy cavern where his son lay dying. He did not come near him, through hatred of the wife, sulking like an ill-tempered dog.

Six more days passed, then one morning, as Céleste, who now slept on the ground on two loose bundles of straw, was going to see whether her man was better, she no longer heard his rapid breathing from the interior of his recess. Terror stricken, she asked:

"Well, Césaire, what sort of a night had you?"

He did not answer. She put out her hand to touch him, and the flesh on his face felt cold as ice. She uttered a great cry, the long cry of a woman overpowered with fright. He was dead.

At this cry the deaf old man appeared at the top of his ladder, and when he saw Céleste rushing to call for help, he quickly descended, placed his hand

on his son's face, and suddenly realizing what had happened, went to shut the door from the inside, to prevent the wife from re-entering and resuming possession of the dwelling, since his son was no longer living.

Then he sat down on a chair by the dead man's side.

Some of the neighbors arrived, called out and knocked. He did not hear them. One of them broke the glass of the window and jumped into the room. Others followed. The door was opened again and Céleste reappeared, all in tears, with swollen face and bloodshot eyes. Then old Amable, vanquished, without uttering a word, climbed back to his loft.

The funeral took place next morning. Then, after the ceremony, the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law found themselves alone in the farmhouse with the child.

It was the usual dinner hour. She lighted the fire, made some soup and placed the plates on the table, while the old man sat on the chair waiting without appearing to look at her. When the meal was ready she bawled in his ear:

"Come, daddy, you must eat." He rose up, took his seat at the end of the table, emptied his soup bowl, masticated his bread and butter, drank his two glasses of cider and then took himself off.

It was one of those warm days, one of those enjoyable days when life ferments, pulsates, blooms all over the surface of the soil.

Old Amable pursued a little path across the fields. He looked at the young wheat and the young oats, thinking that his son was now under the earth, his poor boy! He walked along wearily, dragging his

legs after him in a limping fashion. And, as he was all alone in the plain, all alone under the blue sky, in the midst of the growing crops, all alone with the larks which he saw hovering above his head, without hearing their light song, he began to weep as he proceeded on his way.

Then he sat down beside a pond and remained there till evening, gazing at the little birds that came there to drink. Then, as the night was falling, he returned to the house, supped without saying a word and climbed up to his loft. And his life went on as in the past. Nothing was changed, except that his son Césaire slept in the cemetery.

What could he, an old man, do? He could work no longer; he was now good for nothing except to swallow the soup prepared by his daughter-in-law. And he ate it in silence, morning and evening, watching with an eye of rage the little boy also taking soup, right opposite him, at the other side of the table. Then he would go out, prowl about the fields after the fashion of a vagabond, hiding behind the barns where he would sleep for an hour or two as if he were afraid of being seen and then come back at the approach of night.

But Céleste's mind began to be occupied by graver anxieties. The farm needed a man to look after it and cultivate it. Somebody should be there always to go through the fields, not a mere hired laborer, but a regular farmer, a master who understood the business and would take an interest in the farm. A lone woman could not manage the farming, watch the price of corn and direct the sale and purchase of cattle. Then ideas came into her head, simple practical ideas, which she had turned over in her head at

night. She could not marry again before the end of the year, and it was necessary at once to take care of pressing interests, immediate interests.

Only one man could help her out of her difficulties, Victor Lecoq, the father of her child. He was strong and understood farming; with a little money in his pocket he would make an excellent cultivator. She was aware of his skill, having known him while he was working on her parents' farm.

So one morning, seeing him passing along the road with a cart of manure, she went out to meet him. When he perceived her, he drew up his horses and she said to him as if she had met him the night before:

"Good-morrow, Victor—are you quite well, the same as ever?"

He replied:

"I'm quite well, the same as ever—and how are you?"

"Oh, I'd be all right, only that I'm alone in the house, which bothers me on account of the farm."

Then they remained chatting for a long time, leaning against the wheel of the heavy cart. The man every now and then lifted up his cap to scratch his forehead and began thinking, while she, with flushed cheeks, went on talking warmly, told him about her views, her plans, her projects for the future. At last he said in a low tone:

"Yes, it can be done."

She opened her hand like a countryman clinching a bargain and asked:

"Is it agreed?"

He pressed her outstretched hand.

"'Tis agreed."

"It's settled, then, for next Sunday?"
"It's settled for next Sunday."
"Well, good-morning, Victor."
"Good-morning, Madame Houlbrèque."

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## PART III

This particular Sunday was the day of the village festival, the annual festival in honor of the patron saint, which in Normandy is called the assembly.

For the last eight days quaint-looking vehicles in which live the families of strolling fair exhibitors, lottery managers, keepers of shooting galleries and other forms of amusement or exhibitors of curiosities whom the peasants call "wonder-makers" could be seen coming along the roads drawn slowly by gray or sorrel horses.

The dirty wagons with their floating curtains, accompanied by a melancholy-looking dog, who trotted, with his head down, between the wheels, drew up one after the other on the green in front of the town hall. Then a tent was erected in front of each ambulant abode, and inside this tent could be seen, through the holes in the canvas, glittering things which excited the envy or the curiosity of the village youngsters.

As soon as the morning of the fête arrived all the booths were opened, displaying their splendors of glass or porcelain, and the peasants on their way to mass looked with genuine satisfaction at these modest shops which they saw again, nevertheless, each succeeding year.

Early in the afternoon there was a crowd on the green. From every neighboring village the farmers arrived, shaken along with their wives and children in the two-wheeled open chars à bancs, which rattled along, swaying like cradles. They unharnessed at their friends' houses and the farmyards were filled with strange-looking traps, gray, high, lean, crooked, like long-clawed creatures from the depths of the sea. And each family, with the youngsters in front and the grown-up ones behind, came to the assembly with tranquil steps, smiling countenances and open hands, big hands, red and bony, accustomed to work and apparently tired of their temporary rest.

A clown was blowing a trumpet. The barrel-organ accompanying the carrousel sent through the air its shrill jerky notes. The lottery-wheel made a whirring sound like that of cloth tearing, and every moment the crack of the rifle could be heard. And the slow-moving throng passed on quietly in front of the booths resembling paste in a fluid condition, with the motions of a flock of sheep and the awkwardness of heavy animals who had escaped by chance.

The girls, holding one another's arms in groups of six or eight, were singing; the youths followed them, making jokes, with their caps over their ears and their blouses stiffened with starch, swollen out like blue balloons.

The whole countryside was there—masters, laboring men and women servants.

Old Amable himself, wearing his old-fashioned green frock coat, had wished to see the assembly, for he never failed to attend on such an occasion.

He looked at the lotteries, stopped in front of the shooting galleries to criticize the shots and interested himself specially in a very simple game which consisted in throwing a big wooden ball into the open mouth of a mannikin carved and painted on a board.

Suddenly he felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Daddy Malivoire, who exclaimed:

"Ha, daddy! Come and have a glass of brandy."

And they sat down at the table of an open-air restaurant.

They drank one glass of brandy, then two, then three, and old Amable once more began wandering through the assembly. His thoughts became slightly confused, he smiled without knowing why, he smiled in front of the lotteries, in front of the wooden horses and especially in front of the killing game. He remained there a long time, filled with delight, when he saw a holiday-maker knocking down the gendarme or the curé, two authorities whom he instinctively distrusted. Then he went back to the inn and drank a glass of cider to cool himself. It was late, night came on. A neighbor came to warn him:

"You'll get back home late for the stew, daddy."

Then he set out on his way to the farmhouse. A soft shadow, the warm shadow of a spring night, was slowly descending on the earth.

When he reached the front door he thought he saw through the window which was lighted up two persons in the house. He stopped, much surprised, then he went in, and he saw Victor Lecoq seated at the table, with a plate filled with potatoes before

him, taking his supper in the very same place where his son had sat.

And he turned round suddenly as if he wanted to go away. The night was very dark now. Céleste started up and shouted at him:

"Come quick, daddy! Here's some good stew to finish off the assembly with."

He complied through inertia and sat down, watching in turn the man, the woman and the child. Then he began to eat quietly as on ordinary days.

Victor Lecoq seemed quite at home, talked from time to time to Céleste, took up the child in his lap and kissed him. And Céleste again served him with food, poured out drink for him and appeared happy while speaking to him. Old Amable's eyes followed them attentively, though he could not hear what they were saying.

When he had finished supper (and he had scarcely eaten anything, there was such a weight at his heart) he rose up, and instead of ascending to his loft as he did every night he opened the gate of the yard and went out into the open air.

When he had gone, Céleste, a little uneasy, asked:

"What is he going to do?"

Victor replied in an indifferent tone:

"Don't bother yourself. He'll come back when he's tired."

Then she saw after the house, washed the plates and wiped the table, while the man quietly took off his clothes. Then he slipped into the dark and hollow bed in which she had slept with Césaire.

The yard gate opened and old Amable again appeared. As soon as he entered the house he looked round on every side with the air of an old dog on

the scent. He was in search of Victor Lecoq. As he did not see him, he took the candle off the table and approached the dark niche in which his son had died. In the interior of it he perceived the man lying under the bed clothes and already asleep. Then the deaf man noiselessly turned round, put back the candle and went out into the yard.

Céleste had finished her work. She put her son into his bed, arranged everything and waited for her father-in-law's return before lying down herself.

She remained sitting on a chair, without moving her hands, and with her eyes fixed on vacancy.

As he did not come back, she murmured in a tone of impatience and annoyance:

"This good-for-nothing old man will make us burn four sous' worth of candles."

Victor answered from under the bed clothes:

"It's over an hour since he went out. We ought to see whether he fell asleep on the bench outside the door."

"I'll go and see," she said.

She rose up, took the light and went out, shading the light with her hand in order to see through the darkness.

She saw nothing in front of the door, nothing on the bench, nothing on the dung heap, where the old man used sometimes to sit in hot weather.

But, just as she was on the point of going in again, she chanced to raise her eyes toward the big apple tree, which sheltered the entrance to the farmyard, and suddenly she saw two feet—two feet at the height of her face belonging to a man who was hanging.

She uttered terrible cries:

"Victor! Victor! Victor!"

He ran out in his shirt. She could not utter another word, and turning aside her head so as not to see, she pointed toward the tree with her outstretched arm.

Not understanding what she meant, he took the candle in order to find out, and in the midst of the foliage lit up from below he saw old Amable hanging high up with a stable-halter round his neck.

A ladder was leaning against the trunk of the apple tree.

Victor ran to fetch a bill-hook, climbed up the tree and cut the halter. But the old man was already cold and his tongue protruded horribly with a frightful grimace.

# THE PARROT

## I

EVERYBODY in Fécamp knew Mother Patin's story. She had certainly been unfortunate with her husband, for in his lifetime he used to beat her, just as wheat is threshed in the barn.

He was master of a fishing bark and had married her, formerly, because she was pretty, although poor.

Patin was a good sailor, but brutal. He used to frequent Father Auban's inn, where he would usually drink four or five glasses of brandy, on lucky days eight or ten glasses and even more, according to his mood. The brandy was served to the customers by Father Auban's daughter, a pleasing brunette, who attracted people to the house only by her pretty face, for nothing had ever been gossiped about her.

Patin, when he entered the inn, would be satisfied to look at her and to compliment her politely and respectfully. After he had had his first glass of brandy he would already find her much nicer; at the second he would wink; at the third he would say: "If you were only willing, Mam'zelle Désirée——" without ever finishing his sentence; at the fourth he would try to hold her back by her skirt in order to kiss her; and when he went as high as ten it was Father Auban who brought him the remaining drinks.

The old innkeeper, who knew all the tricks of the

trade, made Désirée walk about between the tables in order to increase the consumption of drinks; and Désirée, who was a worthy daughter of Father Auban, flitted around among the benches and joked with them, her lips smiling and her eyes sparkling.

Patin got so well accustomed to Désirée's face that he thought of it even while at sea, when throwing out his nets, in storms or in calms, on moonlit or dark evenings. He thought of her while holding the tiller in the stern of his boat, while his four companions were slumbering with their heads on their arms. He always saw her, smiling, pouring out the yellow brandy with a peculiar shoulder movement and then exclaiming as she turned away: "There, now; are you satisfied?"

He saw her so much in his mind's eye that he was overcome by an irresistible desire to marry her, and, not being able to hold out any longer, he asked for her hand.

He was rich, owned his own vessel, his nets and a little house at the foot of the hill on the Retenue, whereas Father Auban had nothing. The marriage was therefore eagerly agreed upon and the wedding took place as soon as possible, as both parties were desirous for the affair to be concluded as early as convenient.

Three days after the wedding Patin could no longer understand how he had ever imagined Désirée to be different from other women. What a fool he had been to encumber himself with a penniless creature, who had undoubtedly inveigled him with some drug which she had put in his brandy!

He would curse all day long, break his pipe with his teeth and maul his crew. After he had sworn

by every known term at everything that came his way he would rid himself of his remaining anger on the fish and lobsters, which he pulled from the nets and threw into the baskets amid oaths and foul language. When he returned home he would find his wife, Father Auban's daughter, within reach of his mouth and hand, and it was not long before he treated her like the lowest creature in the world. As she listened calmly, accustomed to paternal violence, he grew exasperated at her quiet, and one evening he beat her. Then life at his home became unbearable.

For ten years the principal topic of conversation on the Retenue was about the beatings that Patin gave his wife and his manner of cursing at her for the least thing. He could, indeed, curse with a richness of vocabulary in a roundness of tone unequalled by any other man in Fécamp. As soon as his ship was sighted at the entrance of the harbor, returning from the fishing expedition, every one awaited the first volley he would hurl from the bridge as soon as he perceived his wife's white cap.

Standing at the stern, he would steer, his eye fixed on the bows and on the sail, and, notwithstanding the difficulty of the narrow passage and the height of the turbulent waves, he would search among the watching women and try to recognize his wife, Father Auban's daughter, the wretch!

Then, as soon as he saw her, notwithstanding the noise of the wind and waves, he would let loose upon her with such power and volubility that every one would laugh, although they pitied her greatly. When he arrived at the dock he would relieve his mind, while unloading the fish, in such an expressive manner that he attracted around him all the loafers

of the neighborhood. The words left his mouth sometimes like shots from a cannon, short and terrible, sometimes like peals of thunder, which roll and rumble for five minutes, such a hurricane of oaths that he seemed to have in his lungs one of the storms of the Eternal Father.

When he left his ship and found himself face to face with her, surrounded by all the gossips of the neighborhood, he would bring up a new cargo of insults and bring her back to their dwelling, she in front, he behind, she weeping, he yelling at her.

At last, when alone with her behind closed doors, he would thrash her on the slightest pretext. The least thing was sufficient to make him raise his hand, and when he had once begun he did not stop, but he would throw into her face the true motive for his anger. At each blow he would roar: "There, you beggar! There, you wretch! There, you pauper! What a bright thing I did when I rinsed my mouth with your rascal of a father's apology for brandy!"

The poor woman lived in continual fear, in a ceaseless trembling of body and soul, in everlasting expectation of outrageous thrashings.

This lasted ten years. She was so timorous that she would grow pale whenever she spoke to any one, and she thought of nothing but the blows with which she was threatened; and she became thinner, more yellow and drier than a smoked fish.

## II

One night, when her husband was at sea, she was suddenly awakened by the wild roaring of the wind!

She sat up in her bed, trembling, but, as she heard nothing more, she lay down again; almost immediately there was a roar in the chimney which shook the entire house; it seemed to cross the heavens like a pack of furious animals snorting and roaring.

Then she arose and rushed to the harbor. Other women were arriving from all sides, carrying lanterns. The men also were gathering, and all were watching the foaming crests of the breaking waves.

The storm lasted fifteen hours. Eleven sailors never returned; Patin was among them.

In the neighborhood of Dieppe the wreck of his bark, the *Jeune-Amélie,* was found. The bodies of his sailors were found near Saint-Valéry, but his body was never recovered. As his vessel seemed to have been cut in two, his wife expected and feared his return for a long time, for if there had been a collision he alone might have been picked up and carried afar off.

Little by little she grew accustomed to the thought that she was rid of him, although she would start every time that a neighbor, a beggar or a peddler would enter suddenly.

One afternoon, about four years after the disappearance of her husband, while she was walking along the Rue aux Juifs, she stopped before the house of an old sea captain who had recently died and whose furniture was for sale. Just at that moment a parrot was at auction. He had green feathers and a blue head and was watching everybody with a displeased look. "Three francs!" cried the auctioneer. "A bird that can talk like a lawyer, three francs!"

A friend of the Patin woman nudged her and said:

"You ought to buy that, you who are rich. It would be good company for you. That bird is worth more than thirty francs. Anyhow, you can always sell it for twenty or twenty-five!"

Patin's widow added fifty centimes, and the bird was given her in a little cage, which she carried away. She took it home, and, as she was opening the wire door in order to give it something to drink, he bit her finger and drew blood.

"Oh, how naughty he is!" she said.

Nevertheless she gave it some hemp-seed and corn and watched it pruning its feathers as it glanced warily at its new home and its new mistress.

On the following morning, just as day was breaking, the Patin woman distinctly heard a loud, deep, roaring voice calling: "Are you going to get up, carrion?"

Her fear was so great that she hid her head under the sheets, for when Patin was with her as soon as he would open his eyes he would shout those well-known words into her ears.

Trembling, rolled into a ball, her back prepared for the thrashing which she already expected, her face buried in the pillows, she murmured: "Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he is here! Good Lord! he has come back!"

Minutes passed; no noise disturbed the quiet room. Then, trembling, she stuck her head out of the bed, sure that he was there, watching, ready to beat her. Except for a ray of sun shining through the window, she saw nothing, and she said to herself: "He must be hidden."

She waited a long time and then, gaining courage,

she said to herself: "I must have dreamed it, seeing there is nobody here."

A little reassured, she closed her eyes, when from quite near a furious voice, the thunderous voice of the drowned man, could be heard crying: "Say! when in the name of all that's holy are you going to get up, you b——?"

She jumped out of bed, moved by obedience, by the passive obedience of a woman accustomed to blows and who still remembers and always will remember that voice! She said: "Here I am, Patin; what do you want?"

But Patin did not answer. Then, at a complete loss, she looked around her, then in the chimney and under the bed and finally sank into a chair, wild with anxiety, convinced that Patin's soul alone was there, near her, and that he had returned in order to torture her.

Suddenly she remembered the loft, in order to reach which one had to take a ladder. Surely he must have hidden there in order to surprise her. He must have been held by savages on some distant shore, unable to escape until now, and he had returned, worse that ever. There was no doubting the quality of that voice. She raised her head and asked: "Are you up there, Patin?"

Patin did not answer. Then, with a terrible fear which made her heart tremble, she climbed the ladder, opened the skylight, looked, saw nothing, entered, looked about and found nothing. Sitting on some straw, she began to cry, but while she was weeping, overcome by a poignant and supernatural terror, she heard Patin talking in the room below.

He seemed less angry and he was saying: "Nasty weather! Fierce wind! Nasty weather! I haven't eaten, damn it!"

She cried through the ceiling: "Here I am, Patin; I am getting your meal ready. Don't get angry."

She ran down again. There was no one in the room. She felt herself growing weak, as if death were touching her, and she tried to run and get help from the neighbors, when a voice near her cried out: "I haven't had my breakfast, by G——!"

And the parrot in his cage watched her with his round, knowing, wicked eye. She, too, looked at him wildly, murmuring: "Ah! so it's you!"

He shook his head and continued: "Just you wait! I'll teach you how to loaf."

What happened within her? She felt, she understood that it was he, the dead man, who had come back, who had disguised himself in the feathers of this bird in order to continue to torment her; that he would curse, as formerly, all day long, and bite her, and swear at her, in order to attract the neighbors and make them laugh. Then she rushed for the cage and seized the bird, which scratched and tore her flesh with its claws and beak. But she held it with all her strength between her hands. She threw it on the ground and rolled over it with the frenzy of one possessed. She crushed it and finally made of it nothing but a little green, flabby lump which no longer moved or spoke. Then she wrapped it in a cloth, as in a shroud, and she went out in her night-gown, barefoot; she crossed the dock, against which the choppy waves of the sea were beating, and she shook the cloth and let drop this little dead thing,

which looked like so much grass. Then she returned, threw herself on her knees before the empty cage, and, overcome by what she had done, kneeled and prayed for forgiveness, as if she had committed some heinous crime.

# DREAMS

THEY had just dined together, five old friends, a writer, a doctor and three rich bachelors without any profession.

They had talked about everything, and a feeling of lassitude came over them, that feeling which precedes and leads to the departure of guests after festive gatherings. One of those present, who had for the last five minutes been gazing silently at the surging boulevard dotted with gas-lamps, with its rattling vehicles, said suddenly:

"When you've nothing to do from morning till night, the days are long."

"And the nights too," assented the guest who sat next to him. "I sleep very little; pleasures fatigue me; conversation is monotonous. Never do I come across a new idea, and I feel, before talking to any one, a violent longing to say nothing and to listen to nothing. I don't know what to do with my evenings."

The third idler remarked:

"I would pay a great deal for anything that would help me to pass just two pleasant hours every day."

The writer, who had just thrown his overcoat across his arm, turned round to them, and said:

"The man who could discover a new vice and introduce it among his fellow creatures, even if it were to shorten their lives, would render a greater

service to humanity than the man who found the means of securing to them eternal salvation and eternal youth."

The doctor burst out laughing, and, while he chewed his cigar, he said:

"Yes, but it is not so easy to discover it. Men have, however crudely, been seeking for and working for the object you refer to since the beginning of the world. The men who came first reached perfection at once in this way. We are hardly equal to them."

One of the three idlers murmured:

"What a pity!"

Then, after a minute's pause, he added:

"If we could only sleep, sleep well, without feeling hot or cold, sleep with that perfect unconsciousness we experience on nights when we are thoroughly fatigued, sleep without dreams."

"Why without dreams?" asked the guest sitting next to him.

The other replied:

"Because dreams are not always pleasant; they are always fantastic, improbable, disconnected; and because when we are asleep we cannot have the sort of dreams we like. We ought to dream waking."

"And what's to prevent you?" asked the writer.

The doctor flung away the end of his cigar.

"My dear fellow, in order to dream when you are awake, you need great power and great exercise of will, and when you try to do it, great weariness is the result. Now, real dreaming, that journey of our thoughts through delightful visions, is assuredly the sweetest experience in the world; but it must come naturally, it must not be provoked

in a painful manner, and must be accompanied by absolute bodily comfort. This power of dreaming I can give you, provided you promise that you will not abuse it."

The writer shrugged his shoulders:

"Ah! yes, I know—hasheesh, opium, green tea—artificial paradises. I have read Baudelaire, and I even tasted the famous drug, which made me very sick."

But the doctor, without stirring from his seat, said:

"No; ether, nothing but ether; and I would suggest that you literary men should use it sometimes."

The three rich bachelors drew closer to the doctor.

One of them said:

"Explain to us the effects of it."

And the doctor replied:

"Let us put aside big words, shall we not? I am not talking of medicine or morality; I am talking of pleasure. You give yourselves up every day to excesses which consume your lives. I want to indicate to you a new sensation, possible only to intelligent men—let us say even very intelligent men—dangerous, like everything else that overexcites our organs, but exquisite. I might add that you would require a certain preparation, that is to say, practice, to feel in all their completeness the singular effects of ether.

"They are different from the effects of hasheesh, of opium, or morphia, and they cease as soon as the absorption of the drug is interrupted, while the other generators of day dreams continue their action for hours.

"I am now going to try to analyze these feelings as clearly as possible. But the thing is not easy, so facile, so delicate, so almost imperceptible, are these sensations.

"It was when I was attacked by violent neuralgia that I made use of this remedy, which since then I have, perhaps, slightly abused.

"I had acute pains in my head and neck, and an intolerable heat of the skin, a feverish restlessness. I took up a large bottle of ether, and, lying down, I began to inhale it slowly.

"At the end of some minutes I thought I heard a vague murmur, which ere long became a sort of humming, and it seemed to me that all the interior of my body had become light, light as air, that it was dissolving into vapor.

"Then came a sort of torpor, a sleepy sensation of comfort, in spite of the pains which still continued, but which had ceased to make themselves felt. It was one of those sensations which we are willing to endure and not any of those frightful wrenches against which our tortured body protests.

"Soon the strange and delightful sense of emptiness which I felt in my chest extended to my limbs, which, in their turn, became light, as light as if the flesh and the bones had been melted and the skin only were left, the skin necessary to enable me to realize the sweetness of living, of bathing in this sensation of well-being. Then I perceived that I was no longer suffering. The pain had gone, melted away, evaporated. And I heard voices, four voices, two dialogues, without understanding what was said. At one time there were only indistinct sounds, at

another time a word reached my ear. But I recognized that this was only the humming I had heard before, but emphasized. I was not asleep; I was not awake; I comprehended, I felt, I reasoned with the utmost clearness and depth, with extraordinary energy and intellectual pleasure, with a singular intoxication arising from this separation of my mental faculties.

"It was not like the dreams caused by hasheesh or the somewhat sickly visions that come from opium; it was an amazing acuteness of reasoning, a new way of seeing, judging and appreciating the things of life, and with the certainty, the absolute consciousness that this was the true way.

"And the old image of the Scriptures suddenly came back to my mind. It seemed to me that I had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, that all the mysteries were unveiled, so much did I find myself under the sway of a new, strange and irrefutable logic. And arguments, reasonings, proofs rose up in a heap before my brain only to be immediately displaced by some stronger proof, reasoning, argument. My head had, in fact, become a battleground of ideas. I was a superior being, armed with invincible intelligence, and I experienced a huge delight at the manifestation of my power.

"It lasted a long, long time. I still kept inhaling the ether from my flagon. Suddenly I perceived that it was empty."

The four men exclaimed at the same time:

"Doctor, a prescription at once for a liter of ether!"

But the doctor, putting on his hat, replied:

"As to that, certainly not; go and let some one else poison you!"

And he left them.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is your opinion on the subject?

# A PORTRAIT

"HELLO! there's Milial!" said somebody near me. I looked at the man who had been pointed out, as I had been wishing for a long time to meet this Don Juan.

He was no longer young. His gray hair looked a little like those fur bonnets worn by certain Northern peoples, and his long beard, which fell down over his chest, had also somewhat the appearance of fur. He was talking to a lady, leaning toward her, speaking in a low voice and looking at her with an expression full of respect and tenderness.

I knew his life, or at least as much as was known of it. He had loved madly several times, and there had been certain tragedies with which his name had been connected. When I spoke to women who were the loudest in his praise, and asked them whence came this power, they always answered, after thinking for a while: "I don't know—he has a certain charm about him."

He was certainly not handsome. He had none of the elegance that we ascribe to conquerors of feminine hearts. I wondered what might be his hidden charm. Was it mental? I never had heard of a clever saying of his. In his glance? Perhaps. Or in his voice? The voices of some beings have a certain irresistible attraction, almost suggesting the flavor of things good to eat. One is hungry for

them, and the sound of their words penetrates us like a dainty morsel. A friend was passing. I asked him: "Do you know Monsieur Milial?"

"Yes."

"Introduce us."

A minute later we were shaking hands and talking in the doorway. What he said was correct, agreeable to hear; it contained no irritable thought. The voice was sweet, soft, caressing, musical; but I had heard others much more attractive, much more moving. One listened to him with pleasure, just as one would look at a pretty little brook. No tension of the mind was necessary in order to follow him, no hidden meaning aroused curiosity, no expectation awoke interest. His conversation was rather restful, but it did not awaken in one either a desire to answer, to contradict or to approve, and it was as easy to answer him as it was to listen to him. The response came to the lips of its own accord, as soon as he had finished talking, and phrases turned toward him as if he had naturally aroused them.

One thought soon struck me. I had known him for a quarter of an hour, and it seemed as if he were already one of my old friends, that I had known all about him for a long time; his face, his gestures, his voice, his ideas. Suddenly, after a few minutes of conversation, he seemed already to be installed in my intimacy. All constraint disappeared between us, and, had he so desired, I might have confided in him as one confides only in old friends.

Certainly there was some mystery about him. Those barriers that are closed between most people and that are lowered with time when sympathy,

similar tastes, equal intellectual culture and constant intercourse remove constraint—those barriers seemed not to exist between him and me, and no doubt this was the case between him and all people, both men and women, whom fate threw in his path.

After half an hour we parted, promising to see each other often, and he gave me his address after inviting me to take luncheon with him in two days.

I forgot what hour he had stated, and I arrived too soon; he was not yet home. A correct and silent domestic showed me into a beautiful, quiet, softly lighted parlor. I felt comfortable there, at home. How often I have noticed the influence of apartments on the character and on the mind! There are some which make one feel foolish; in others, on the contrary, one always feels lively. Some make us sad, although well lighted and decorated in light-colored furniture; others cheer us up, although hung with sombre material. Our eye, like our heart, has its likes and dislikes, of which it does not inform us, and which it secretly imposes on our temperament. The harmony of furniture, walls, the style of an *ensemble,* act immediately on our mental state, just as the air from the woods, the sea or the mountains modifies our physical natures.

I sat down on a cushion-covered divan and felt myself suddenly carried and supported by these little silk bags of feathers, as if the outline of my body had been marked out beforehand on this couch.

Then I looked about. There was nothing striking about the room; everywhere were beautiful and modest things, simple and rare furniture, Oriental curtains which did not seem to come from a depart-

ment store but from the interior of a harem; and exactly opposite me hung the portrait of a woman. It was a portrait of medium size, showing the head and the upper part of the body, and the hands, which were holding a book. She was young, bareheaded; ribbons were woven in her hair; she was smiling sadly. Was it because she was bareheaded, was it merely her natural expression? I never have seen a portrait of a lady which seemed so much in its place as that one in that dwelling. Of all those I knew I have seen nothing like that one. All those that I know are on exhibition, whether the lady be dressed in her gaudiest gown, with an attractive headdress and a look which shows that she is posing first of all before the artist and then before those who will look at her or whether they have taken a comfortable attitude in an ordinary gown. Some are standing majestically in all their beauty, which is not at all natural to them in life. All of them have something, a flower or a jewel, a crease in the dress or a curve of the lip, which one feels to have been placed there for effect by the artist. Whether they wear a hat or merely their hair one can immediately notice that they are not entirely natural. Why? One cannot say without knowing them, but the effect is there. They seem to be calling somewhere, on people whom they wish to please and to whom they wish to appear at their best advantage; and they have studied their attitudes, sometimes modest, sometimes haughty.

What could one say about this one? She was at home and alone. Yes, she was alone, for she was smiling as one smiles when thinking in solitude of

something sad or sweet, and not as one smiles when one is being watched. She seemed so much alone and so much at home that she made the whole large apartment seem absolutely empty. She alone lived in it, filled it, gave it life. Many people might come in and converse, laugh, even sing; she would still be alone with a solitary smile, and she alone would give it life with her pictured gaze.

That look also was unique. It fell directly on me, fixed and caressing, without seeing me. All portraits know that they are being watched, and they answer with their eyes, which see, think, follow us without leaving us, from the very moment we enter the apartment they inhabit. This one did not see me; it saw nothing, although its look was fixed directly on me. I remembered the surprising verse of Baudelaire:

> And your eyes, attractive as those of a portrait.

They did indeed attract me in an irresistible manner; those painted eyes which had lived, or which were perhaps still living, threw over me a strange, powerful spell. Oh, what an infinite and tender charm, like a passing breeze, like a dying sunset of lilac, rose and blue, a little sad like the approaching night, which comes behind the sombre frame and out of those impenetrable eyes! Those eyes, created by a few strokes from a brush, hide behind them the mystery of that which seems to be and which does not exist, which can appear in the eyes of a woman, which can make love blossom within us.

The door opened and M. Milial entered. He excused himself for being late. I excused myself for

being ahead of time. Then I said: "Might I ask you who is this lady?"

He answered: "That is my mother. She died very young."

Then I understood whence came the inexplicable attraction of this man.

# FEAR

WE went on deck after dinner. The Mediterranean lay before us without a ripple and shimmering in the moonlight. The great ship glided on, casting upward to the star-studded sky a great serpent of black smoke. Behind us the dazzling white water, all white from the rapid course of the heavy boat, and lashed by the propeller, foamed and swirled and radiated light, so that it might have been compared to boiling, bubbling moonlight.

There were six or eight of us, silent with admiration, and gazing toward far-away Africa, whither we were going. The commandant, who was smoking a cigar with us, brusquely resumed the conversation begun at dinner.

"Yes, I was afraid then. My ship remained for six hours on that rock, beaten by the wind and with a great hole in the side. Fortunately, we were picked up toward evening by an English collier that sighted us."

Then a tall man, with sun-burned face and grave demeanor, one of those men who have evidently traveled in unknown and far-away lands, whose calm eye seems to preserve in its depths something of the foreign scenes it had observed, whose appearance shows great will and courage, spoke for the first time.

"You say, commandant, that you were afraid. I beg to disagree with you. You are in error as to the meaning of the word and the nature of the sensation you experienced. An energetic man never is afraid in the presence of great danger. He is excited, aroused, full of anxiety, but fear is something quite different."

The commandant laughed and answered: "Bah! I assure you that I was afraid."

Then the man of the tanned countenance addressed us deliberately, as follows:

"Permit me to explain. Fear—and the boldest men may feel fear—is something horrible, an atrocious sensation, a sort of disintegration of the soul, a terrible spasm of brain and heart, the very memory of which brings a shudder of anguish, but when one is brave he feels it neither under fire nor in the presence of sure death, nor in the face of any well-known danger. It springs up under certain abnormal conditions, under certain mysterious influences, in the presence of vague peril. Real fear is a sort of reminiscence of fantastic terrors of the past. A man who believes in ghosts and imagines he sees a spectre in the darkness must feel fear in all its horror.

"As for me, I was overwhelmed with fear in broad daylight about ten years ago, and again one December night last winter.

"Nevertheless, I have gone through many dangers, many adventures which seemed to promise death. I have often been in battle. I have been left for dead by thieves. In America I was condemned to be hanged as an insurgent, and off the coast of China thrown into the sea from the deck of a ship.

Each time I thought I was lost, and made up my mind to it at once without regret or weakness.

"But that is not fear.

"I have felt it in Africa, and yet it is a child of the north. The sunlight banished it like the mist. Consider this fact, gentlemen. Among the Orientals life has no value; resignation is natural. The nights are clear and are free from the sombre spirit of unrest that haunts the brain in cooler lands. In the Orient panic is known, but not fear.

"Well, then! Here is the incident that befell me in Africa:

"I was crossing the great sands of Ouargla. It is one of the most curious districts in the world. You have seen the unbroken, continuous sand of the endless shores of the ocean. Well, imagine the ocean itself turned to sand in the midst of a hurricane. Imagine a silent tempest with motionless billows of yellow dust. They are as high as mountains, these uneven, rolling waves, rising exactly like, but larger, and streaked like moiré silk. On this wild, silent and motionless sea the consuming rays of the tropical sun poured down pitilessly and directly. You have to climb these slopes of red-hot ash, descend again on the other side, climb again, climb, climb without halt, without repose, without shade. The horses cough, sink to their knees and slide down the sides of these remarkable hills.

"We were a couple of friends, followed by eight spahis and four camels with their drivers. We had ceased talking, overcome by heat, fatigue and as parched with thirst such as was this burning desert. Suddenly one of our men uttered a cry. We

all halted, surprised by an unsolved phenomenon known only to travelers in these trackless wastes.

"Somewhere, near us, in an indeterminable direction, a drum was beating, the mysterious drum of the desert. It was beating distinctly, now with greater resonance and again more faintly, ceasing, then resuming its uncanny roll.

"The Arabs, terrified, stared at one another, and one said in his own language: 'Death is upon us.' As he spoke, my companion, my friend, almost a brother, dropped from his horse, falling face downward on the sand, overcome by a sunstroke.

"And for two hours, while I tried in vain to save him, this weird drum filled my ears with its monotonous, intermittent and incomprehensible tattoo, and I felt fear lay hold of my bones—real fear, hideous fear, in the presence of this beloved corpse, in this hole scorched by the sun, surrounded by four mountains of sand and two hundred leagues from any French settlement, while echo assailed our ears with this furious drumbeat.

"On that day I realized what fear was, but since then I have had another and still more vivid experience."

The commandant interrupted the speaker:

"I beg your pardon, but what was the drum?"

"I cannot say," the traveller replied. "No one knows. Our officers are often surprised by this singular noise and attribute it generally to the echo produced by a hail of grains of sand blown by the wind against the dry and brittle leaves of weeds, for it has always been noticed that the phenomenon occurs in proximity to little plants burned by the sun and hard as parchment. This sound seems to

be magnified, multiplied and swelled beyond measure in its progress through the valleys of sand, and the drum therefore might be considered a sort of sound mirage. Nothing more. But I did not know that until later.

"I shall proceed to my second instance.

"It was last winter, in a forest of the northeast of France. The sky was so overcast that night came two hours earlier than usual. My guide was a peasant, who walked beside me along the narrow road, under the vault of fir trees, through which the wind howled in its fury. Between the tree tops I saw the fleeting clouds, which seemed to hasten as if to escape some object of terror. Sometimes in a fierce gust of wind the whole forest bowed in the same direction with a groan of pain, and a chill laid hold of me despite my rapid pace and heavy clothing.

"We were to sleep and take supper at an old gamekeeper's house not much farther on. I had come for the shooting.

"My guide sometimes raised his eyes and murmured: 'Ugly weather!' Then he told me about the people among whom we were to spend the night. The father had killed a poacher two years before, and since then had been gloomy and behaved as if haunted by a memory. His two married sons lived with him.

"The darkness was profound. I could see nothing before me or around me, and the mass of overhanging, interlacing trees rubbed together, filling the night with an incessant whispering. Finally I saw a light, and presently my companion knocked at a door. Sharp women's voices answered us, then a

man's voice, a choking voice, asked, 'Who goes there?' My guide gave his name. We entered and beheld a memorable picture.

"An old man with white hair, wild eyes and a loaded gun in his hands stood waiting for us in the middle of the kitcehen, while two strong youths, armed with axes, guarded the door. In the sombre corners I distinguished two women kneeling with faces to the wall.

"We explained matters, and the old man stood his gun against the wall, at the same time ordering that a room be prepared for me. Then, as the women did not stir: 'Look you, monsieur,' said he, 'two years ago this night I killed a man, and last year he came back to haunt me. I expect him again to-night.'

"Then he added in a tone that made me smile:

"'And so we are somewhat excited.'

"I reassured him as best I could, happy to have arrived on that particular evening, and to witness this superstitious terror. I told stories and almost succeeded in calming the whole household.

"Near the fireplace slept an old dog, with mustaches and almost blind, with his head between his paws, such a dog as reminds you of people you have known.

"Outside the raging storm was beating against the little house, and suddenly, through a small pane of glass, a sort of peep-hole placed near the door, I saw in a brilliant flash of lightning a mass of trees thrashed by the wind.

"In spite of my efforts, I realized that terror was laying hold of these people, and each time that I ceased to speak all ears listened for distant sounds.

Annoyed at these foolish fears, I was about to retire to my bed, when the old gamekeeper suddenly leaped from his chair, seized his gun and stammered wildly: 'There he is! there he is! I hear him!' The two women again sank upon their knees in the corner and hid their faces, while the sons took up their axes. I was going to try to pacify them once more, when the sleeping dog awakened suddenly, and, raising his head and stretching his neck, looked at the fire with his dim eyes, and uttered one of those mournful howls which make travellers shudder in the darkness and solitude of the country. All eyes were focused upon him now as he rose on his feet, as if haunted by a vision, and began to howl at something invisible, unknown and doubtless horrible, for he was bristling all over. The gamekeeper, with livid face, cried: 'He scents him! He scents him! He was there when I killed him.' The two women, terrified, began to wail in concert with the dog.

"In spite of myself cold chills ran down my spine. This vision of the animal at such a time and place, in the midst of these frightened people, was something frightful to witness.

"For an hour the dog howled without stirring; he howled as if in the anguish of a nightmare; and fear, horrible fear, came over me. Fear of what? How can I say? It was fear, and that is all I know.

"We remained motionless and pale, expecting something awful to happen. Our ears were strained and our hearts beat loudly, while the slightest noise startled us. Then the beast began to walk around the room, sniffing at the walls and growling con-

stantly. His manœuvres were driving us mad! Then the countryman who had brought me thither seized the dog in a paroxysm of rage, and carrying him to a door, which opened into a small court, thrust him forth.

"The noise was suppressed, and we were left plunged in a silence still more terrible. Then suddenly we all started. Some one was gliding along the outside wall toward the forest; then he seemed to be feeling the door with a trembling hand; then for two minutes nothing was heard and we almost lost our minds. Then he returned, still feeling along the wall and scratching lightly upon the door, as a child might do with his fingernails. Suddenly a face appeared behind the glass of the peephole, a white face with eyes shining like those of the cat tribe. A sound was heard, an indistinct, plaintive murmur.

"Then there was a formidable burst of noise in the kitchen. The old gamekeeper had fired, and the two sons at once rushed forward and barricaded the window with the great table, reënforcing it with the buffet.

"I swear to you that at the shock of the gun's discharge, which I did not expect, such an anguish laid hold of my heart, my soul and my very body that I felt myself about to fall, about to die from fear.

"We remained there until dawn, unable to move, in short, seized by an indescribable numbness of the brain.

"No one dared to remove the barricade until a thin ray of sunlight appeared through a crack in the back room.

"At the base of the wall and under the window we found the old dog lying dead, his skull shattered by a ball.

"He had escaped from the little court by digging a hole under a fence."

The dark-visaged man became silent, then he added:

"And yet on that night I incurred no danger, but I should rather again pass through all the hours in which I have confronted the most terrible perils than the one minute when that gun was discharged at the shaggy head in the window."

# DARKNESS

A NIGHTMARE

I LOVE darkness passionately, as one loves his country or his sweetheart, with an instinctive, deep, unconquerable love. I love it with all my senses, with my eyes, which see it, my nose, which breathes it, my ears, which hear the silence, with my whole body, which is caressed by the shadows. The larks sing in the sunlight, in the blue sky, in the sweet warm air of clear mornings. The owl, like a black spot, flees through the dark night, and, intoxicated by the immensity of darkness, he emits his sinister cry.

Daylight tires and bores me; it is brutal and noisy. I rise with difficulty, dress languidly, go out with regret, and every step, every movement, gesture, speech, thought, tires me as if I were lifting a crushing burden.

When the sun sets a confused joy fills my whole body. I rouse myself and take heart. As darkness grows, I feel myself quite different, younger, stronger, more alert, happier. I watch this gentle shadow come down from the sky and deepen: it drowns the city, like an impenetrable cloak, it hides, erases and destroys color and forms, surrounds houses, creatures and monuments with its imperceptibly growing darkness.

Then I long to screech with joy, like an owl, to run over the roofs like a cat, and an impetuous and unconquerable desire to love something warms my blood.

Sometimes I walk through the dark suburbs, sometimes through the forests near Paris, where I hear my sisters the beasts, and my brothers the poachers, roaming about.

Whatever one loves madly always ends by killing one. But how can I explain what has happened to me? How can I even make it understood that I am able to tell it? I do not know; all I know is that it is so—that's all!

Yesterday—was it yesterday?—yes, probably, unless it was the day before—another day, another month, another year—I do not know, but it must be yesterday, since daylight has not yet appeared, since the sun has not risen. But how long is night lasting? How long? Who can say? Who will ever know?

Well, yesterday, I went out after dinner as I do every evening. The weather was beautiful. As I walked toward the boulevards, I gazed overhead at the immense dome of darkness dotted with stars.

Everything was light in the clear air, from the planets to the gaslights. So many lights were burning above and below that the darkness seemed luminous. Clear nights are more enjoyable than the finest days of sunlight.

On the boulevards the cafés were flaring, people were drinking, laughing and passing by. I went into some theatre for a few minutes. Which theatre? I do not know. It was so bright inside that I grew sad and left, my spirits a little dampened by

this shock of brutal light, by the artificial scintillation of the enormous crystal luster, by the row of footlights, by the dreariness of false and crude brilliancy. I reached the Champs-Elysées, where the cafés-concerts shone through the foliage like blazing fires. The chestnut trees, tinged with yellow light, looked phosphorescent. And the arc-lights, like pale, shining leaves or gigantic living pearls, made the poor gaslights look feeble beside their mysterious white brilliancy.

I stopped under the Arc de Triomphe to look at the long, beautiful, starry avenue leading toward Paris, between two lines of fire! Then I looked at the stars, thrown haphazard into the immensity of infinity, where they combine strange figures which make people dream.

I went into the Bois de Boulogne, and I stayed there for a long, long time. A strange shivering had taken hold of me, an unforeseen and powerful emotion, an exaltation of mind that bordered on insanity. For a long time I walked straight ahead. Then I came back.

What time was it when I passed again under the Arc de Triomphe? I do not know. The city was sleeping, and heavy black clouds were slowly stretching over the sky.

For the first time I felt that something new and strange was about to happen. It seemed as if it were cold, as if the air were growing thicker, and night, my beloved night, was hanging heavy in my heart. The avenue was now deserted. Two policemen alone were walking about the cabstand and on the sidewalk, barely lighted by the gas-jets, which seemed to be dying. A string of wagons was going

to that great market, the Halles. They were rolling along slowly, loaded down with carrots, turnips and cabbages. The drivers, out of sight, were sleeping, while the horses plodded along, each wagon noiselessly following the preceding one over the wooden pavement. Under each light the carrots shone red, the turnips white, the cabbages green; and these red, white and green loads followed each other endlessly. I accompanied them for a distance, then I turned off at the Rue Royale and walked to the boulevards. Not a soul could be seen; there were no more brightly lighted cafés; everything was silent. I never had seen Paris so dead, so utterly deserted. I pulled forth my watch. It was two o'clock.

Something seemed to compel me to continue walking. So I went to the Bastille. I thought that I never had seen a night so dark, for I could not even distinguish the July Column, the top of which was lost in impenetrable blackness. A great curtain of black clouds had drowned the stars and seemed to be hovering over the earth as if to swallow it up.

I turned back. There was no longer any one about me. At the Place du Château d'Eau, however, a drunkard almost bumped into me, and then disappeared. For a long time I heard the echoes of his uneven steps. I kept on walking. On the heights of the Faubourg Montmartre a cab passed, going toward the Seine. I called. The coachman did not answer. A woman was wandering about near the Rue Drouot; I heard her say: "Monsieur, listen——" I quickened my step in order to avoid her outstretched hand. Then nothing more. In front of the Vaudeville I found a ragpicker searching in

the gutter. His little lantern was held a few inches above the ground. I asked him: "What time is it, my man?"

He grunted: "How do I know? I have no watch."

Then I suddenly noticed that the street lights were out. I know that they are extinguished early, before daylight, for reasons of economy; but day was still far away, so far away!

"Let us go to the Halles," I thought; "at least I may find some life there."

I set out again, but I could not see clearly enough to find my way. I went forward slowly, as one walks in a forest, recognizing and counting the streets.

In front of the Crédit Lyonnais a dog growled. I turned through the Rue de Grammont, and lost myself; I wandered around, and finally recognized the Bourse by the iron railing which surrounds it. The whole of Paris was sleeping, in deep, frightful sleep. In the distance, however, I could hear a cab rolling by, just one cab—perhaps it was the one which had passed a while ago. I tried to catch up with it, going toward the noise of its wheels, through the dark, solitary streets, as dark as death.

I lost myself again. Where was I? What a mad idea to put the gas out so early! Not a soul, not a single belated person, not one howl from nocturnal cats. Nothing!

"Where were the policemen?" I asked myself. "If I call they will come." I called loudly. No one answered. I called louder. My voice seemed to be without an echo, weak, smothered, crushed by this impenetrable darkness.

I shouted: "Help! help! help!" My desperate cry remained unanswered. What time could it be? I drew out my watch, but I had no matches. I listened to the regular tick-tack of the little mechanism with a strange and unknown joy. It seemed to be alive. I was less alone. What a mystery! I went on again like a blind man, feeling the walls with my cane, and all the time raising my eyes to the sky, hoping that day might at last appear; but the sky was black—blacker even than the city.

What time could it be? It seemed to me as if I had been walking forever, for my legs were bending under me; I was out of breath and suffering fearful pangs of hunger.

I decided to ring at the first door I should find. I pulled at a brass knob and the bell sounded strangely throughout the house; it seemed as if it were alone in the dwelling. I waited, but there was no answer; nobody opened the door. I rang again, and again I waited—nothing!

I became frightened! I ran to the next house, and twenty times I made the bell tinkle in the dark corridor, in which the concierge must be sleeping, but he did not awake; and I went on farther, pulling with all my might at all the bells, kicking at the doors and knocking with my cane and with my hands.

Suddenly I noticed that I was arriving at the Halles. They were deserted, without a sound, without a movement, without a wagon, a man, any vegetables or flowers—they were empty, motionless, deserted, dead!

A terrible fear seized me—it was horrible! What was happening? My God! what was happening? I

went on again. But the time? The time? Who could tell me what time it was? No clock was striking. I thought: "Let me open the front of my watch and feel the needle with my fingers." I drew my watch—it was no longer ticking—it had stopped! Nothing, not a sound throughout the city, not a light, nothing! Not even the distant rumbling of a cab!

I walked as far as the river bank, and an icy coldness rose from the river. Was the Seine still running? I must find out. I found a stairway and went down. I could not hear the current bubbling under the arches of my bridge—more steps—more sand—mud—then water. I dipped my arm into it; it was running cold, almost icy, almost exhausted, almost dead!

And I felt that I should never have the strength to go up again, and I should die there of hunger, exhaustion and cold.

# JULIE ROMAIN

TWO years ago this spring I was making a walking tour along the shore of the Mediterranean. Is there anything more pleasant than to meditate while walking at a good pace along a highway? One walks in the sunlight, through the caressing breeze, at the foot of the mountains, along the coast of the sea. And one dreams! What a flood of illusions, loves, adventures pass through a pedestrian's mind during a two hours' march! What a crowd of confused and joyous hopes enter into you with the mild, light air! You drink them in with the breeze, and they awaken in your heart a longing for happiness which increases with the hunger induced by walking. The fleeting, charming ideas fly and sing like birds.

I was following that long road which goes from Saint Raphael to Italy, or, rather, that long, splendid panoramic highway which seems made for the representation of all the love-poems of earth. And I thought that from Cannes, where one poses, to Monaco, where one gambles, people come to this spot of the earth for hardly any other purpose than to get embroiled or to throw away money on chance games, displaying under this delicious sky and in this garden of roses and oranges all base vanities and foolish pretensions and vile lusts, showing up

the human mind such as it is, servile, ignorant, arrogant and full of cupidity.

Suddenly I saw some villas in one of those ravishing bays that one meets at every turn of the mountain; there were only four or five fronting the sea at the foot of the mountains, and behind them a wild fir wood slopes into two great valleys, that were untraversed by roads. I stopped short before one of these chalets, it was so pretty: a small white house with brown trimmings, overrun with rambler roses up to the top.

The garden was a mass of flowers, of all colors and all kinds, mixed in a coquettish, well-planned disorder. The lawn was full of them, big pots flanked each side of every step of the porch, pink or yellow clusters framed each window, and the terrace with the stone balustrade, which enclosed this pretty little dwelling, had a garland of enormous red bells, like drops of blood. Behind the house I saw a long avenue of orange trees in blossom, which went up to the foot of the mountain.

Over the door appeared the name, "Villa d'Antan," in small gold letters.

I asked myself what poet or what fairy was living there, what inspired, solitary being had discovered this spot and created this dream house, which seemed to nestle in a nosegay.

A workman was breaking stones up the street, and I went to him to ask the name of the proprietor of this jewel.

"It is Madame Julie Romain," he replied.

Julie Romain! In my childhood, long ago, I had heard them speak of this great actress, the rival of Rachel.

No woman ever was more applauded and more loved—especially more loved! What duels and suicides on her account and what sensational adventures! How old was this seductive woman now? Sixty, seventy, seventy-five! Julie Romain here, in this house! The woman who had been adored by the greatest musician and the most exquisite poet of our land! I still remember the sensation (I was then twelve years of age) which her flight to Sicily with the latter, after her rupture with the former, caused throughout France.

She had left one evening, after a *première,* where the audience had applauded her for a whole half hour, and had recalled her eleven times in succession. She had gone away with the poet, in a post-chaise, as was the fashion then; they had crossed the sea, to love each other in that antique island, the daughter of Greece, in that immense orange wood which surrounds Palermo, and which is called the "Shell of Gold."

People told of their ascension of Mount Etna and how they had leaned over the immense crater, arm in arm, cheek to cheek, as if to throw themselves into the very abyss.

Now he was dead, that maker of verses so touching and so profound that they turned the heads of a whole generation, so subtle and so mysterious that they opened a new world to the younger poets.

The other one also was dead—the deserted one, who had attained through her musical periods that are alive in the memories of all, periods of triumph and of despair, intoxicating triumph and heart-rending despair.

And she was there, in that house veiled by flowers!

I did not hesitate, but rang the bell.

A small servant answered, a boy of eighteen with awkward mien and clumsy hands. I wrote in pencil on my card a gallant compliment to the actress, begging her to receive me. Perhaps, if she knew my name, she would open her door to me.

The little valet took it in, and then came back, asking me to follow him. He led me to a neat and decorous salon, furnished in the Louis-Philippe style, with stiff and heavy furniture, from which a little maid of sixteen, slender but not pretty, took off the covers in my honor.

Then I was left alone.

On the walls hung three portraits, that of the actress in one of her rôles, that of the poet in his close-fitting greatcoat and the ruffled shirt then in style, and that of the musician seated at a piano.

She, blond, charming, but affected, according to the fashion of her day, was smiling, with her pretty mouth and blue eyes; the painting was careful, fine, elegant, but lifeless.

Those faces seemed to be already looking upon posterity.

The whole place had the air of a bygone time, of days that were done and men who had vanished.

A door opened and a little woman entered, old, very old, very small, with white hair and white eyebrows, a veritable white mouse, and as quick and furtive of movement.

She held out her hand to me, saying in a voice still fresh, sonorous and vibrant:

"Thank you, monsieur. How kind it is of the

men of to-day to remember the women of yesterday! Sit down."

I told her that her house had attracted me, that I had inquired for the proprietor's name, and that, on learning it, I could not resist the desire to ring her bell.

"This gives me all the more pleasure, monsieur," she replied, "as it is the first time that such a thing has happened. When I received your card, with the gracious note, I trembled as if an old friend who had disappeared for twenty years had been announced to me. I am like a dead body, whom no one remembers, of whom no one will think until the day when I shall actually die; then the newspapers will mention Julie Romain for three days, relating anecdotes and details of my life, reviving memories, and praising me greatly. Then all will be over with me."

After a few moments of silence, she continued:

"And this will not be so very long now. In a few months, in a few days, nothing will remain but a little skeleton of this little woman who is now alive."

She raised her eyes toward her portrait, which smiled down upon this caricature of herself; then she looked at those of the two men, the disdainful poet and the inspired musician, who seemed to say: "What does this ruin want of us?"

An indefinable, poignant, irresistible sadness overwhelmed my heart, the sadness of existences that have had their day, but who are still debating with their memories, like a person drowning in deep water.

From my seat I could see on the highroad the

handsome carriages that were whirling from Nice to Monaco; inside them I saw young, pretty, rich and happy women and smiling, satisfied men. Following my eye, she understood my thought and murmured with a smile of resignation:

"One cannot both be and have been."

"How beautiful life must have been for you!" I said.

She heaved a great sigh.

"Beautiful and sweet! And for that reason I regret it so much."

I saw that she was disposed to talk of herself, so I began to question her, gently and discreetly, as one might touch bruised flesh.

She spoke of her successes, her intoxications and her friends, of her whole triumphant existence.

"Was it on the stage that you found your most intense joys, your true happiness?" I asked.

"Oh, no!" she replied quickly.

I smiled; then, raising her eyes to the two portraits, she said, with a sad glance:

"It was with them."

"Which one?" I could not help asking.

"Both. I even confuse them up a little now in my old woman's memory, and then I feel remorse."

"Then, madame, your acknowledgment is not to them, but to Love itself. They were merely its interpreters."

"That is possible. But what interpreters!"

"Are you sure that you have not been, or that you might not have been, loved as well or better by a simple man, but not a great man, who would have offered to you his whole life and heart, all his

thoughts, all his days, his whole being, while these gave you two redoubtable rivals, Music and Poetry?"

"No, monsieur, no!" she exclaimed emphatically, with that still youthful voice, which caused the soul to vibrate. "Another one might perhaps have loved me more, but he would not have loved me as these did. Ah! those two sang to me of the music of love as no one else in the world could have sung of it. How they intoxicated me! Could any other man express what they knew so well how to express in tones and in words? Is it enough merely to love if one cannot put all the poetry and all the music of heaven and earth into love? And they knew how to make a woman delirious with songs and with words. Yes, perhaps there was more of illusion than of reality in our passion; but these illusions lift you into the clouds, while realities always leave you trailing in the dust. If others have loved me more, through these two I have understood, felt and worshipped love."

Suddenly she began to weep.

She wept silently, shedding tears of despair.

I pretended not to see, looking off into the distance. She resumed, after a few minutes:

"You see, monsieur, with nearly every one the heart ages with the body. But this has not happened with me. My body is sixty-nine years old, while my poor heart is only twenty. And that is the reason why I live all alone, with my flowers and my dreams."

There was a long silence between us. She grew calmer and continued, smiling:

"How you would laugh at me, if you knew, if you knew how I pass my evenings, when the weather

is fine. I am ashamed and I pity myself at the same time."

Beg as I might, she would not tell me what she did. Then I rose to leave.

"Already!" she exclaimed.

And as I said that I wished to dine at Monte Carlo, she asked timidly:

"Will you not dine with me? It would give me a great deal of pleasure."

I accepted at once. She rang, delighted, and after giving some orders to the little maid she took me over her house.

A kind of glass-enclosed veranda, filled with shrubs, opened into the dining-room, revealing at the farther end the long avenue of orange trees extending to the foot of the mountain. A low seat, hidden by plants, indicated that the old actress often came there to sit down.

Then we went into the garden, to look at the flowers. Evening fell softly, one of those calm, moist evenings when the earth breathes forth all her perfumes. Daylight was almost gone when we sat down at table. The dinner was good and it lasted a long time, and we became intimate friends, she and I, when she understood what a profound sympathy she had aroused in my heart. She had taken two thimblefuls of wine, as the phrase goes, and had grown more confiding and expansive.

"Come, let us look at the moon," she said. "I adore the good moon. She has been the witness of my most intense joys. It seems to me that all my memories are there, and that I need only look at her to bring them all back to me. And even—sometimes—in the evening—I offer to myself a pretty

play—yes, pretty—if you only knew! But no, you would laugh at me. I cannot—I dare not—no, no—really—no."

I implored her to tell me what it was.

"Come, now! come, tell me; I promise you that I will not laugh. I swear it to you—come, now!"

She hesitated. I took her hands—those poor little hands, so thin and so cold!—and I kissed them one after the other, several times, as her lovers had once kissed them. She was moved and hesitated.

"You promise me not to laugh?"

"Yes, I swear it to you."

"Well, then, come."

She rose, and as the little domestic, awkward in his green livery, removed the chair behind her, she whispered quickly a few words into his ear.

"Yes, madame, at once," he replied.

She took my arm and led me to the veranda.

The avenue of oranges was really splendid to see. The full moon made a narrow path of silver, a long bright line, which fell on the yellow sand, between the round, opaque crowns of the dark trees.

As these trees were in bloom, their strong, sweet perfume filled the night, and swarming among their dark foliage I saw thousands of fireflies, which looked like seeds fallen from the stars.

"Oh, what a setting for a love scene!" I exclaimed.

She smiled.

"Is it not true? Is it not true? You will see!"

And she made me sit down beside her.

"This is what makes one long for more life. But you hardly think of these things, you men of to-day. You are speculators, merchants and men of affairs.

You no longer even know how to talk to us. When I say 'you,' I mean young men in general. Love has been turned into a liaison which very often begins with an unpaid dressmaker's bill. If you think the bill is dearer than the woman, you disappear; but if you hold the woman more highly, you pay it. Nice morals—and a nice kind of love!"

She took my hand.

"Look!"

I looked, astonished and delighted. Down there at the end of the avenue, in the moonlight, were two young people, with their arms around each other's waist. They were walking along, interlaced, charming, with short, little steps, crossing the flakes of light, which illuminated them momentarily, and then sinking back into the shadow. The youth was dressed in a suit of white satin, such as men wore in the eighteenth century, and had on a hat with an ostrich plume. The girl was arrayed in a gown with *panniers,* and the high, powdered coiffure of the handsome dames of the time of the Regency.

They stopped a hundred paces from us, and standing in the middle of the avenue, they kissed each other with graceful gestures.

Suddenly I recognized the two little servants. Then one of those dreadful fits of laughter that convulse you made me writhe in my chair. But I did not laugh aloud. I resisted, convulsed and feeling almost ill, as a man whose leg is cut off resists the impulse to cry out.

As the young pair turned toward the farther end of the avenue they again became delightful. They went farther and farther away, finally disappearing

as a dream disappears. I no longer saw them. The avenue seemed a sad place.

I took my leave at once, so as not to see them again, for I guessed that this little play would last a long time, awakening, as it did, a whole past of love and of stage scenery; the artificial past, deceitful and seductive, false but charming, which still stirred the heart of this amorous old commédienne.

# OUR LETTERS

EIGHT hours of railway travel induce sleep for some persons and insomnia for others. With me, any journey prevents my sleeping on the following night.

At about five o'clock I arrived at the estate of Abelle, which belongs to my friends, the Murets d'Artus, to spend three weeks there. It is a pretty house, built by one of their grandfathers in the style of the latter half of the last century. Therefore it has that intimate character of dwellings that have always been inhabited, furnished and enlivened by the same people. Nothing changes; nothing alters the soul of the dwelling, from which the furniture has never been taken out, the tapestries never unnailed, thus becoming worn out, faded, discolored, on the same walls. None of the old furniture leaves the place; only from time to time it is moved a little to make room for a new piece, which enters there like a new-born infant in the midst of brothers and sisters.

The house is on a hill in the center of a park which slopes down to the river, where there is a little stone bridge. Beyond the water the fields stretch out in the distance, and here one can see the cows wandering around, pasturing on the moist grass; their eyes seem full of the dew, mist and freshness of the pasture. I love this dwelling, just

as one loves a thing which one ardently desires to possess. I return here every autumn with infinite delight; I leave with regret.

After I had dined with this friendly family, by whom I was received like a relative, I asked my friend, Paul Muret: "Which room did you give me this year?"

"Aunt Rose's room."

An hour later, followed by her three children, two little girls and a boy, Madame Muret d'Artus installed me in Aunt Rose's room, where I had not yet slept.

When I was alone I examined the walls, the furniture, the general aspect of the room, in order to attune my mind to it. I knew it but little, as I had entered it only once or twice, and I looked indifferently at a pastel portrait of Aunt Rose, who gave her name to the room.

This old Aunt Rose, with her curls, looking at me from behind the glass, made very little impression on my mind. She looked to me like a woman of former days, with principles and precepts as strong on the maxims of morality as on cooking recipes, one of these old aunts who are the bugbear of gayety and the stern and wrinkled angel of provincial families.

I never had heard her spoken of; I knew nothing of her life or of her death. Did she belong to this century or to the preceding one? Had she left this earth after a calm or a stormy existence? Had she given up to heaven the pure soul of an old maid, the calm soul of a spouse, the tender one of a mother, or one moved by love? What difference did

it make? The name alone, "Aunt Rose," seemed ridiculous, common, ugly.

I picked up a candle and looked at her severe face, hanging far up in an old gilt frame. Then, as I found it insignificant, disagreeable, even unsympathetic, I began to examine the furniture. It dated from the period of Louis XVI., the Revolution and the Directorate. Not a chair, not a curtain had entered this room since then, and it gave out the subtle odor of memories, which is the combined odor of wood, cloth, chairs, hangings, peculiar to places wherein have lived hearts that have loved and suffered.

I retired but did not sleep. After I had tossed about for an hour or two, I decided to get up and write some letters.

I opened a little mahogany desk with brass trimmings, which was placed between the two windows, in hope of finding some ink and paper; but all I found was a quill-pen, very much worn, and chewed at the end. I was about to close this piece of furniture, when a shining spot attracted my attention: it looked like the yellow head of a nail. I scratched it with my finger, and it seemed to move. I seized it between two finger-nails, and pulled as hard as I could. It came toward me gently. It was a long gold pin which had been slipped into a hole in the wood and remained hidden there.

Why? I immediately thought that it must have served to work some spring which hid a secret, and I looked. It took a long time. After about two hours of investigation, I discovered another hole opposite the first one, but at the bottom of a groove. Into this I stuck my pin: a little shelf sprang to-

ward my face, and I saw two packages of yellow letters, tied with a blue ribbon.

I read them. Here are two of them:

So you wish me to return to you your letters, my dearest friend. Here they are, but it pains me to obey. Of what are you afraid? That I might lose them? But they are under lock and key. Do you fear that they might be stolen? I guard against that, for they are my dearest treasure.

Yes, it pains me deeply. I wondered whether, perhaps, you might not be feeling some regret! Not regret at having loved me, for I know that you still do, but the regret of having expressed on white paper this living love in hours when your heart did not confide in me, but in the pen that you held in your hand. When we love, we have need of confession, need of talking or writing, and we either talk or write. Words fly away, those sweet words made of music, air and tenderness, warm and light, which escape as soon as they are uttered, which remain in the memory alone, but which one can neither see, touch nor kiss, as one can do with the words written by your hand. Your letters? Yes, I am returning them to you! But with what sorrow!

Undoubtedly, you must have had an after thought of delicate shame at expressions that are ineffaceable. In your sensitive and timid soul you must have regretted having written to a man that you loved him. You remembered sentences that called up recollections, and you said to yourself: "I will make ashes of those words."

Be satisfied, be calm. Here are your letters. I love you.

MY FRIEND:

No, you have not understood me, you have not guessed. I do not regret, and I never shall, that I told you of my affection. I will always write to you, but you must return my letters to me as soon as you have read them.

I shall shock you, my friend, when I tell you the reason for this demand. It is not poetic, as you imagined, but practical. I am afraid, not of you, but of some mischance. I am guilty. I do not wish my fault to affect others than myself.

Understand me well. You and I may both die. You might fall off your horse, since you ride every day; you might die from a sudden attack, from a duel, from heart disease, from a carriage accident, in a thousand ways. For, if there is only one death, there are more ways of its reaching us than there are days for us to live.

Then your sisters, your brother, or your sister-in-law might find my letters! Do you think that they love me? I doubt it. And then, even if they adored me, is it possible for two women and one man to know a secret—such a secret!—and not to tell of it?

I seem to be saying very disagreeable things, speaking first of your death, and then suspecting the discreetness of your relatives.

But don't all of us die sooner or later? And it is almost certain that one of us will precede the other under the ground. We must therefore foresee all dangers, even that one.

As for me, I will keep your letters beside mine, in the secret of my little desk. I will show them to you there, sleeping side by side in their silken hiding place, full of our love, like lovers in a tomb.

You will say to me: "But if you should die first, my dear, your husband will find these letters."

Oh! I fear nothing. First of all, he does not know the secret of my desk, and then he will not look for it. And even if he finds it after my death, I fear nothing.

Did you ever stop to think of all the love letters that have been found after death? I have been thinking of this for a long time, and that is the reason I decided to ask you for my letters.

Think that never, do you understand, never, does a woman burn, tear or destroy the letters in which it is told her that she is loved. That is our whole life, our whole hope, expectation and dream. These little papers which bear our name in caressing terms are relics which we adore; they are chapels in which we are the saints. Our love letters are our titles to beauty, grace, seduction, the intimate vanity of our womanhood; they are the treasures of our heart. No, a woman does not destroy these secret and delicious archives of her life.

But, like everybody else, we die, and then—then these letters are found! Who finds them? The husband. Then what does he do? Nothing. He burns them.

Oh, I have thought a great deal about that! Just think that every day women are dying who have been loved; every day the traces and proofs of their fault fall into the hands of their husbands, and that there is never a scandal, never a duel.

Think, my dear, of what a man's heart is. He avenges himself on a living woman; he fights with the man who has dishonored her, kills him while she lives, because, well, why? I do not know exactly why. But, if, after her death, he finds similar proofs, he burns them and no one is the wiser, and he continues to shake hands with the friend of the dead woman, and feels quite at ease that these letters should not have fallen into strange hands, and that they are destroyed.

Oh, how many men I know among my friends who must have burned such proofs, and who pretend to know nothing, and yet who would have fought madly had they found them when she was still alive! But she is dead. Honor has changed. The tomb is the boundary of conjugal sinning.

Therefore, I can safely keep our letters, which, in your hands, would be a menace to both of us. Do you dare to say that I am not right?

I love you and kiss you. ROSE.

I raised my eyes to the portrait of Aunt Rose, and as I looked at her severe, wrinkled face, I thought of all those women's souls which we do not know, and which we suppose to be so different from

what they really are, whose inborn and ingenuous craftiness we never can penetrate, their quiet duplicity; and a verse of De Vigny returned to my memory:

"Always this comrade whose heart is uncertain."

# MOHAMMED FRIPOUILLE

"SHALL we take our coffee on the roof?" asked the captain.

"I shall be delighted," I answered.

He arose. It was already dark in the room, which was lighted only by an interior courtyard, according to the custom of Moorish houses. In front of the high, arched windows vines drooped from the broad roof, where one spent the warm summer evenings. Only the fruit remained on the table, enormous African fruits, grapes as large as plums, soft, purple-skinned figs, yellow pears, long, fat bananas and Tougourt dates in a basket of alfa grass.

The dusky-skinned man servant opened the door, and I went up the azure-walled stairway, which received from above the soft light of the dying day.

I heaved a deep sigh of relief as we stepped out on the roof. It overlooked the harbor and the distant shores.

The house the captain had bought was an old Arab dwelling, situated in the heart of that ancient city, in the midst of those winding alleys where the strange population of the African coast swarms.

Below us the square, flat roofs descended like giant steps to the slanting roofs of the European city. Behind these one could see the masts of the vessels riding at anchor, then the sea, the calm, blue, broad sea under the calm, blue sky.

We stretched out on some matting, our heads supported by cushions, and, while slowly drinking the savory coffee of that land, I watched the first stars pop out in the darkening sky. One could barely notice them, so far away, so pale, hardly visible.

A light, warm breeze fanned our cheeks, and from time to time heavier, hotter gusts, in which one could discern a vague odor, the odor of Africa, seemed to be a breath from the desert, from across the Atlas range of mountains. The captain, lying on his back, exclaimed:

"What a country, my friend! How sweet life is here! What a peculiar charm rest has here! How these nights are made for dreams!"

I was still watching the stars appear, with an idle yet lively curiosity, with a dreamy delight.

"You ought to tell me something of your life in the South," I murmured.

Captain Marret was one of the oldest officers in the African service, a former spahi who had won his way to fortune by his sword.

Thanks to him and to his widespread connections, I had been able to undertake a wonderful trip into the desert, and I had come that evening to thank him before returning to France.

"What kind of story do you wish?" he asked. "I have had so many adventures during my twelve years in the desert that I can hardly remember any of them."

"Tell me something about the Arabian women," I continued.

He did not answer. He remained stretched out on the matting, his arms folded and his hands under his head, and from time to time I could notice the

faint perfume of his cigar, its smoke rising straight up toward the sky in the calm evening air.

Suddenly he began to laugh.

"Oh, yes! I'll tell you about a queer affair that occurred in the beginning of my stay in Algeria.

"At that time we had in the African division extraordinary types, such as one no longer sees and that are no longer in existence, types which would have interested you enough to make you spend your whole life in this country.

"I was a simple spahi, a little twenty-two-year-old spahi, blond, plucky, supple and vigorous, a regular Algerian soldier, my friend. I was assigned to the military detachment at Boghar. You know Boghar, which is called the balcony of the South; from the top of the fort you saw that country of fire, barren, bare, desolate and stony. That is the real vestibule of the desert, the scorching yet wonderful frontier of the yellow solitudes.

"There were about forty of us spahis at Boghar, a party of convicts and a squadron of African 'chasseurs,' when we learned that the tribe Ouled-Berghi had murdered an English traveller who had come to this country, no one knows how, for the English seem to be possessed by the devil.

"Justice had to be meted out for this crime against a European, but the commanding officer hesitated to send out a company, thinking that an Englishman was not really worth so much trouble.

"As he was talking the matter over with the captain and the lieutenant, a sergeant of spahis, who was waiting to report, suddenly proposed to chastise the whole tribe if they would only give him six men.

"You know that in the South there is much more

freedom than in city garrisons, and between soldier and officer exists a certain friendship which one finds nowhere else.

"The captain began to laugh:

"'You, my man?'

"'Yes, captain, and if you wish I will bring the whole tribe back, prisoners.'

"The commanding officer, who was a whimsical sort of being, took him at his word:

"'You will leave to-morrow morning, with six men of your own picking, and if you don't fulfill your promise look out for yourself!'

"The sergeant smiled.

"'Fear nothing, sir. My prisoners will be here Wednesday noon, at the latest.'

"This sergeant, Mohammed Fripouille, as he was called, was really a remarkable man. He was a Turk, a real Turk, who had entered the service of France after a very varied and doubtless checkered life. He had travelled through many lands: Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt, Palestine, and he must have left his mark in many of these places. He was a regular *bashi-bazouk,* hardy, a reveler, fierce and gay, with a calm, Oriental gaiety. He was fat, very fat, but as nimble as a monkey, and he was a wonderful rider. His mustache, incredibly thick and long, invariably brought to my mind a confused image of crescents and of scimitars. He hated the Arabs with an inexorable hatred, and treated them with a terrible, sly cruelty, continually inventing new treacheries, frightful and well-planned acts of perfidy.

"Besides all this, he possessed marvellous physical strength and was gifted with wonderful audacity.

"'Choose your men, my boy.'

"Mohammed took me. He had confidence in me, and I remained devoted to him, body and soul, for this choice, which pleased me as much then as the cross of honor pleased me later.

"We set out the following morning at dawn, just seven of us. My comrades all belonged to those bandits and pirates who, having marauded and wandered about in every possible country, end by enlisting in some foreign legion. Our African division used to be full of these blackguards, who were excellent soldiers, but not overscrupulous.

"Mohammed had given each of us ten pieces of rope, each about a yard long. Being the youngest and the lightest, I was given, in addition, a long rope, a hundred yards long. When he was asked what he expected to do with all this rope, he answered with his cunning, calm expression:

" 'We'll use that for Arab fishing.'

"And he slyly winked his eye, a trick he had learned from an old African chasseur, a Parisian.

"He rode at the head of our troop, wearing a red turban which he always wore in action, and smiling through his big mustache.

"This enormous Turk was really magnificent, with his powerful chest, his great shoulders and his quiet look. He rode a white horse, of medium size but sturdy; and the rider seemed ten times too heavy for his mount.

"We had entered a rocky little dell, bare, yellow, which extends to the valley of Chélif, and we were talking about our expedition. My companions spoke every imaginable language, for among them were one Spaniard, two Greeks, one American and three

Frenchmen. As for Mohammed, he burred in a manner truly marvellous.

"The sun, the terrible southern sun, which is unknown on the other side of the Mediterranean, was beating down on our shoulders, and we were advancing slowly, as one always does over there.

"We travelled all day long without seeing either a tree or an Arab.

"At about one o'clock in the afternoon, near a little spring which trickled through the rocks, we had eaten the bread and dried mutton we had taken with us; then, after about twenty minutes' rest, we had started off again.

"Toward six o'clock in the evening, after a circuitous march, according to the orders of our leader, we discovered a tribe encamped behind a small hill. The low, brown tents made dark spots against the yellow earth, looking like big desert mushrooms growing at the foot of this red mound, scorched by the sun.

"There were the people we were looking for. Their horses were grazing a little farther away, at the edge of a field of dark-green alfa grass.

"Mohammed gave the order: 'Gallop!' and we rushed into the middle of the camp like a hurricane. The women, wild with fright, covered with white rags which hung and floated around them, quickly ran for their tents, crawling, wriggling and shrieking like hunted beasts. The men, on the other hand, rushed out from all sides, ready to defend themselves.

"We went straight for the largest tent, that of the agha.

"We kept our swords sheathed, following the

example of Mohammed, who was galloping in a peculiar manner. He sat perfectly straight, absolutely motionless on his little horse, which was straining furiously under this ponderous mass. The calmness of the horseman with the long mustache contrasted strangely with the energy of the animal.

"The native chief came out of his tent just as we were arriving before it. He was a tall, thin, dark man, with piercing eyes, a high forehead and arched eyebrows. He cried in Arabic:

" 'What do you wish?'

"Mohammed, stopping his horse short, answered the man in his own language:

" 'Is it you that killed the English traveller?'

"The agha answered in a clear voice:

" 'I am not compelled to answer your questions.'

"Around us a storm was brewing. The Arabs were assembling on all sides, were crowding around us and shouting at us.

"They looked like fierce birds of prey, with their large hooked noses, their thin faces with high cheek-bones, their loose garments fluttering in the wind.

"Mohammed, with his turban on the side of his head, was smiling, his eye was sparkling, one could almost see little thrills of pleasure on his plump, wrinkled cheeks.

"He continued in a thundering voice, which drowned the rising clamor:

" 'Death to him who has given death!'

"He pointed his revolver toward the brown face of the agha. I saw a little smoke issue from the barrel; then a little froth of pink brains and blood spurted from the chief's forehead. He fell on his

back like a log, opening his arms, which spread out the floating folds of his burnous like giant wings.

"I certainly thought that my last day had come, so great was the tumult around us.

"Mohammed had drawn his sword. We followed his example. Swinging the weapon around him in a circle, he cried:

"'Life to those who surrender! Death to the rest!'

"Seizing in his herculean grip the man nearest him, he flattened him out on his saddle and tied his hands, crying to us:

"'Do as I do, and kill all who resist.'

"In five minutes we had captured about twenty Arabs, whose arms we bound firmly. Then we chased the fugitives, for it had been a perfect rout as soon as they saw our naked swords. We brought back about thirty more men.

"All over the plain we could see white specks running. The women were dragging their children along and shrieking in a shrill voice. Yellow dogs, like jackals, were circling around us and barking, showing their white fangs.

"Mohammed, who seemed wild with joy, sprang from his horse and seized the rope which I had brought along:

"'Look out now, my lads,' he said. 'Two of you dismount!'

"Then he did a terrible yet comical thing: he made a string of prisoners, tied so that they were practically hanged. He had firmly tied the fists of the first captive, then he made a slip-knot which he passed around his neck, and then with the same rope he tied the arms of the following man and then

passed the rope around his neck. Our fifty prisoners soon found themselves so tied that the slightest movement of one of them toward escape would have strangled him as well as his two neighbors.

"Every motion they made tightened the knots around their necks, and they had to walk in step and at even distances, otherwise they would choke like rats in a trap.

"When this strange business was finished, Mohammed began to laugh with his silent laugh which shook his whole body without any noise issuing from his mouth.

" 'That's the Arabian chain,' he said.

"We ourselves began to be convulsed with laughter at the surprised and pitiful expressions of our prisoners.

" 'Now, children,' cried our leader, 'drive a stake in at each end and we'll tie up the bunch.'

"A stake was driven at each end of this white string of captives, looking like ghosts, who stood motionless, as if they had been changed to stone.

" 'Now let's have dinner!' said the Turk.

"A fire was kindled and we roasted a lamb, which we carved with our hands. Then we ate some dates we had found in the tents; we drank milk obtained in the same manner, and we managed to pick up a few silver trinkets forgotten by the fugitives in their haste.

"We were just quietly finishing our meal when I noticed, on the opposite hill, a strange-looking crowd. It was the women who had escaped shortly before, nothing but women. They were running toward us. I pointed them out to Mohammed the Rascal.

He smiled.

"'It's the desert!' he said.

"Ah! Yes, the desert!

"They came, galloping wildly, and soon we received a hail of stones which they threw without stopping their horses. As they passed by we saw that they were armed with knives, tent stakes and old kitchen utensils.

"Mohammed cried: 'Mount!' It was high time. The attack was terrible. They came to free the prisoners and tried to cut the rope. The Turk, seeing the danger, became furious and yelled: 'Kill them! Kill them! Kill them!' As we remained motionless, undecided before this new kind of attack, hesitating to kill women, he rushed forward, against the approaching troop.

"Alone, he charged this brigade of women in rags, and the rascal began to slash around him like a madman, with such rage, such fury that one could see a white body fall each time his arm was lowered.

"He was so fierce that the women, terrified, escaped as quickly as they had come, leaving behind them a dozen dead and wounded whose red blood stained their white garments.

"Mohammed, his features convulsed, returned to us, saying:

"'Come on, my lads; we had better get out of here; they will come back.'

"We retreated slowly, leaving our prisoners paralyzed by the fear of strangulation.

"The following day, as noon was ringing, we arrived at Boghar with our human chain. Only six had died on the way, but we had often been forced to loosen the knots from one end of the line to the

other, for a single jolt would strangle a dozen captives."

The captain was silent. I answered nothing. I was thinking of the strange country where such things could be seen; and in the black sky I gazed at the myriads of twinkling stars.

# THE LOVE OF LONG AGO

THE old-fashioned château was built on a wooded knoll in the midst of tall trees with dark-green foliage; the park extended to a great distance, in one direction to the edge of the forest, in another to the distant country. A few yards from the front of the house was a huge stone basin with marble ladies taking a bath; other basins were seen at intervals down to the foot of the slope, and a stream of water fell in cascades from one basin to another.

From the manor house, which preserved the grace of a superannuated coquette, down to the grottos incrusted with shell-work, where slumbered the loves of a bygone age, everything in this antique demesne had retained the physiognomy of former days. Everything seemed to speak still of ancient customs, of the manners of long ago, of former gallantries, and of the elegant trivialities so dear to our grandmothers.

In a parlor in the style of Louis XV, whose walls were covered with shepherds paying court to shepherdesses, beautiful ladies in hoop-skirts, and gallant gentlemen in wigs, a very old woman, who seemed dead as soon as she ceased to move, was almost lying down in a large easy-chair, at each side of which hung a thin, mummy-like hand.

Her dim eyes were gazing dreamily toward the

distant horizon as if they sought to follow through the park the visions of her youth. Through the open window every now and then came a breath of air laden with the odor of grass and the perfume of flowers. It made her white locks flutter around her wrinkled forehead and old memories float through her brain.

Beside her, on a tapestried stool, a young girl, with long fair hair hanging in braids down her back, was embroidering an altar-cloth. There was a pensive expression in her eyes, and it was easy to see that she was dreaming, while her agile fingers flew over her work.

But the old lady turned round her head, and said:

"Berthe, read me something out of the newspapers, that I may still know sometimes what is going on in the world."

The young girl took up a newspaper, and cast a rapid glance over it.

"There is a great deal about politics, grandmamma; shall I pass that over?"

"Yes, yes, darling. Are there no love stories? Is gallantry, then, dead in France, that they no longer talk about abductions or adventures as they did formerly?"

The girl made a long search through the columns of the newspaper.

"Here is one," she said. "It is entitled 'A Love Drama!'"

The old woman smiled through her wrinkles. "Read that for me," she said.

And Berthe commenced. It was a case of vitriol throwing. A wife, in order to avenge herself on her husband's mistress, had burned her face and

eyes. She had left the Court of Assizes acquitted, declared to be innocent, amid the applause of the crowd.

The grandmother moved about excitedly in her chair, and exclaimed:

"This is horrible—why, it is perfectly horrible! See whether you can find anything else to read to me, darling."

Berthe again made a search; and farther down among the reports of criminal cases, she read:

" 'Gloomy Drama. A shop girl, no longer young, allowed herself to be led astray by a young man. Then, to avenge herself on her lover, whose heart proved fickle, she shot him with a revolver. The unhappy man is maimed for life. The jury, all men of moral character, condoning the illicit love of the murderess, honorably acquitted her.' "

This time the old grandmother appeared quite shocked, and, in a trembling voice, she said:

"Why, you people are mad nowadays. You are mad! The good God has given you love, the only enchantment in life. Man has added to this gallantry the only distraction of our dull hours, and here you are mixing up with it vitriol and revolvers, as if one were to put mud into a flagon of Spanish wine."

Berthe did not seem to understand her grandmother's indignation.

"But, grandmamma, this woman avenged herself. Remember she was married, and her husband deceived her."

The grandmother gave a start.

"What ideas have they been filling your head with, you young girls of to-day?"

Berthe replied:

"But marriage is sacred, grandmamma."

The grandmother's heart, which had its birth in the great age of gallantry, gave a sudden leap.

"It is love that is sacred," she said. "Listen, child, to an old woman who has seen three generations, and who has had a long, long experience of men and women. Marriage and love have nothing in common. We marry to found a family, and we form families in order to constitute society. Society cannot dispense with marriage. If society is a chain, each family is a link in that chain. In order to weld those links, we always seek metals of the same order. When we marry, we must bring together suitable conditions; we must combine fortunes, unite similar races and aim at the common interest, which is riches and children. We marry only once, my child, because the world requires us to do so, but we may love twenty times in one lifetime because nature has made us like this. Marriage, you see, is law, and love is an instinct which impels us, sometimes along a straight, and sometimes along a devious path. The world has made laws to combat our instincts—it was necessary to make them; but our instincts are always stronger, and we ought not to resist them too much, because they come from God; while the laws only come from men. If we did not perfume life with love, as much love as possible, darling, as we put sugar into drugs for children, nobody would care to take it just as it is."

Berthe opened her eyes wide in astonishment. She murmured:

"Oh! grandmamma, we can only love once."

The grandmother raised her trembling hands toward Heaven, as if again to invoke the defunct god of gallantries. She exclaimed indignantly:

"You have become a race of serfs, a race of common people. Since the Revolution, it is impossible any longer to recognize society. You have attached big words to every action, and wearisome duties to every corner of existence; you believe in equality and eternal passion. People have written poetry telling you that people have died of love. In my time poetry was written to teach men to love every woman. And we! when we liked a gentleman, my child, we sent him a page. And when a fresh caprice came into our hearts, we were not slow in getting rid of the last lover—unless we kept both of them."

The old woman smiled a keen smile, and a gleam of roguery twinkled in her gray eye, the intellectual, skeptical roguery of those people who did not believe that they were made of the same clay as the rest, and who lived as masters for whom common beliefs were not intended.

The young girl, turning very pale, faltered out:

"So, then, women have no honor?"

The grandmother ceased to smile. If she had kept in her soul some of Voltaire's irony, she had also a little of Jean Jacques's glowing philosophy:

"No honor! because we loved, and dared to say so, and even boasted of it? But, my child, if one of us, among the greatest ladies in France, had lived without a lover, she would have had the entire court laughing at her. Those who wished to live differently had only to enter a convent. And you imagine, perhaps, that your husbands will love but

you alone, all their lives. As if, indeed, this could be the case. I tell you that marriage is a thing necessary in order that society should exist, but it is not in the nature of our race, do you understand? There is only one good thing in life, and that is love. And how you misunderstand it! how you spoil it! You treat it as something solemn like a sacrament, or something to be bought, like a dress."

The young girl caught the old woman's trembling hands in her own.

"Hold your tongue, I beg of you, grandmamma!"

And, on her knees, with tears in her eyes, she prayed to Heaven to bestow on her a great passion, one sole, eternal passion in accordance with the dream of modern poets, while the grandmother, kissing her on the forehead, quite imbued still with that charming, healthy reason with which gallant philosophers tinctured the thought of the eighteenth century, murmured:

"Take care, my poor darling! If you believe in such folly as that, you will be very unhappy."

# MOIRON

AS we were still talking about Pranzini, M. Maloureau, who had been attorney general under the Empire, said: "Oh! I formerly knew a very curious affair, curious for several reasons, as you will see.

"I was at that time imperial attorney in one of the provinces. I had to take up the case which has remained famous under the name of the Moiron case.

"Monsieur Moiron, who was a teacher in the north of France, enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the whole country. He was a person of intelligence, quiet, very religious, a little taciturn; he had married in the district of Boislinot, where he exercised his profession. He had had three children, who had died of consumption, one after the other. From this time he seemed to bestow upon the youngsters confided to his care all the tenderness of his heart. With his own money he bought toys for his best scholars and for the good boys; he gave them little dinners and stuffed them with delicacies, candy and cakes. Everybody loved this good man with his big heart, when suddenly five of his pupils died, in a strange manner, one after the other. It was supposed that there was an epidemic due to the condition of the water, resulting from drought; they looked for the causes without being able to

discover them, the more so that the symptoms were so peculiar. The children seemed to be attacked by a feeling of lassitude; they would not eat, they complained of pains in their stomachs, dragged along for a short time, and died in frightful suffering.

"A post-mortem examination was held over the last one, but nothing was discovered. The vitals were sent to Paris and analyzed, and they revealed the presence of no toxic substance.

"For a year nothing new developed; then two little boys, the best scholars in the class, Moiron's favorites, died within four days of each other. An examination of the bodies was again ordered, and in both of them were discovered tiny fragments of crushed glass. The conclusion arrived at was that the two youngsters must imprudently have eaten from some carelessly cleaned receptacle. A glass broken over a pail of milk could have produced this frightful accident, and the affair would have been pushed no further if Moiron's servant had not been taken sick at this time. The physician who was called in noticed the same symptoms he had seen in the children. He questioned her and obtained the admission that she had stolen and eaten some candies that had been bought by the teacher for his scholars.

"On an order from the court the schoolhouse was searched, and a closet was found which was full of toys and dainties destined for the children. Almost all these delicacies contained bits of crushed glass or pieces of broken needles!

"Moiron was immediately arrested; but he seemed so astonished and indignant at the suspicion hanging over him that he was almost released. However, indications of his guilt kept appearing, and

baffled in my mind my first conviction, based on his excellent reputation, on his whole life, on the complete absence of any motive for such a crime.

"Why should this good, simple, religious man have killed little children, and the very children whom he seemed to love the most, whom he spoiled and stuffed with sweet things, for whom he spent half his salary in buying toys and bonbons?

"One must consider him insane to believe him guilty of this act. Now, Moiron seemed so normal, so quiet, so rational and sensible that it seemed impossible to adjudge him insane.

"However, the proofs kept growing! In none of the candies that were bought at the places where the schoolmaster secured his provisions could the slightest trace of anything suspicious be found.

"He then insisted that an unknown enemy must have opened his cupboard with a false key in order to introduce the glass and the needles into the eatables. And he made up a whole story of an inheritance dependent on the death of a child, determined on and sought by some peasant, and promoted thus by casting suspicions on the schoolmaster. This brute, he claimed, did not care about the other children who were forced to die as well.

"The story was possible. The man appeared to be so sure of himself and in such despair that we should undoubtedly have acquitted him, notwithstanding the charges against him, if two crushing discoveries had not been made, one after the other.

"The first one was a snuffbox full of crushed glass; his own snuffbox, hidden in the desk where he kept his money!

"He explained this new find in an acceptable man-

ner, as the ruse of the real unknown criminal. But a mercer from Saint-Marlouf came to the presiding judge and said that a gentleman had several times come to his store to buy some needles; and he always asked for the thinnest needles he could find, and would break them to see whether they pleased him. The man was brought forward in the presence of a dozen or more persons, and immediately recognized Moiron. The inquest revealed that the schoolmaster had indeed gone into Saint-Marlouf on the days mentioned by the tradesman.

"I will pass over the terrible testimony of children on the choice of dainties and the care which he took to have them eat the things in his presence, and to remove the slightest traces.

"Public indignation demanded capital punishment, and it became more and more insistent, overturning all objections.

"Moiron was condemned to death, and his appeal was rejected. Nothing was left for him but the imperial pardon. I knew through my father that the emperor would not grant it.

"One morning, as I was working in my study, the visit of the prison almoner was announced. He was an old priest who knew men well and understood the habits of criminals. He seemed troubled, ill at ease, nervous. After talking for a few minutes about one thing and another, he arose and said suddenly: 'If Moiron is executed, monsieur, you will have put an innocent man to death.'

"Then he left without bowing, leaving me behind with the deep impression made by his words. He had pronounced them in such a sincere and solemn

manner, opening those lips, closed and sealed by the secret of confession, in order to save a life.

"An hour later I left for Paris, and my father immediately asked that I be granted an audience with the emperor.

"The following day I was received. His majesty was working in a little reception room when we were introduced. I described the whole case, and I was just telling about the priest's visit when a door opened behind the sovereign's chair and the empress, who supposed he was alone, appeared. His majesty, Napoleon, consulted her. As soon as she had heard the matter, she exclaimed: 'This man must be pardoned. He must, since he is innocent.'

"Why did this sudden conviction of a religious woman cast a terrible doubt in my mind?

"Until then I had ardently desired a change of sentence. And now I suddenly felt myself the toy, the dupe of a cunning criminal who had employed the priest and confession as a last means of defence.

"I explained my hesitancy to their majesties. The emperor remained undecided, urged on one side by his natural kindness and held back on the other by the fear of being deceived by a criminal; but the empress, who was convinced that the priest had obeyed a divine inspiration, kept repeating: 'Never mind! It is better to spare a criminal than to kill an innocent man!' Her advice was taken. The death sentence was commuted to one of hard labor.

"A few years later I heard that Moiron had again been called to the emperor's attention on account of his exemplary conduct in the prison at Toulon and was now employed as a servant by the director of the penitentiary.

"For a long time I heard nothing more of this man.

"But about two years ago, while I was spending a summer near Lille with my cousin, De Larielle, I was informed one evening, just as we were sitting down to dinner, that a young priest wished to speak to me.

"I had him shown in and he begged me to come to a dying man who desired absolutely to see me. This had often happened to me in my long career as a magistrate, and, although I had been set aside by the Republic, I was still often called upon in similar circumstances. I therefore followed the priest, who led me to a miserable little room in a large tenement house.

"There I found a strange-looking man on a bed of straw, sitting with his back against the wall, in order to get his breath. He was a sort of skeleton, with dark, gleaming eyes.

"As soon as he saw me, he murmured: 'Don't you recognize me?'

"'No.'

"'I am Moiron.'

"I felt a shiver run through me, and I asked: 'The schoolmaster?'

"'Yes.'

"'How do you happen to be here?'

"'The story is too long. I haven't time to tell it. I was going to die—and that priest was brought to me—and as I knew that you were here I sent for you. It is to you that I wish to confess—since you were the one who once saved my life.'

"His hands clutched the straw of his bed through the sheet and he continued in a hoarse, forcible and low tone: 'You see—I owe you the truth—I owe it

to you—for it must be told to some one before I leave this earth.

"'It is I who killed the children—all of them. I did it—for revenge!

"'Listen. I was an honest, straightforward, pure man—adoring God—this good Father—this Master who teaches us to love, and not the false God, the executioner, the robber, the murderer who governs the earth. I had never done any harm; I had never committed an evil act. I was as good as it is possible to be, monsieur.

"'I married and had children, and I loved them as no father or mother ever loved their children. I lived only for them. I was wild about them. All three of them died! Why? why? What had I done? I was rebellious, furious; and suddenly my eyes were opened as if I were waking up out of a sleep. I understood that God is bad. Why had He killed my children? I opened my eyes and saw that He loves to kill. He loves only that, monsieur. He gives life but to destroy it! God, monsieur, is a murderer! He needs death every day. And He makes it of every variety, in order the better to be amused. He has invented sickness and accidents in order to give Him diversion all through the months and the years; and when He grows tired of this, He has epidemics, the plague, cholera, diphtheria, smallpox, everything possible! But this does not satisfy Him; all these things are too similar; and so from time to time He has wars, in order to see two hundred thousand soldiers killed at once, crushed in blood and in the mud, blown apart, their arms and legs torn off, their heads smashed by bullets, like eggs that fall on the ground.

"'But this is not all. He has made men who eat each other. And then, as men become better than He, He has made beasts, in order to see men hunt them, kill them and eat them. That is not all. He has made tiny little animals which live one day, flies who die by the millions in one hour, ants which we are continually crushing under our feet, and so many, many others that we cannot even imagine. And all these things are continually killing each other and dying. And the good Lord looks on and is amused, for He sees everything, the big ones as well as the little ones, those who are in the drops of water and those in the other firmaments. He watches them and is amused. Wretch!

"'Then, monsieur, I began to kill children. I played a trick on Him. He did not get those. It was not He, but I! And I would have killed many others, but you caught me. There!

"'I was to be executed. I! How He would have laughed! Then I asked for a priest, and I lied. I confessed to him. I lied and I lived.

"'Now, all is over. I can no longer escape from Him. I no longer fear Him, monsieur; I despise Him too much.'

"This poor wretch was frightful to see as he lay there gasping, opening an enormous mouth in order to utter words which could scarcely be heard, his breath rattling, picking at his bed and moving his thin legs under a grimy sheet as though trying to escape.

"Oh! The mere remembrance of it is frightful!

"'You have nothing more to say?' I asked.

"'No, monsieur.'

"'Then, farewell.'

"'Farewell, monsieur, till some day——'

"I turned to the ashen-faced priest, whose dark outline stood out against the wall, and asked: 'Are you going to stay here, Monsieur l'Abbé?'

"'Yes.'

"Then the dying man sneered: 'Yes, yes, He sends His vultures to the corpses.'

"I had had enough of this. I opened the door and ran away."